
PART 3

Draft consolidated budget 2020-21: Finance and legal advice

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Advice provided by the Executive Director of Resources

1. Advice on budget process

The Local Government Act 2003 places a duty on the Executive Director of Resources, as the GLA’s statutory Chief Finance Officer, to report on the robustness of the estimates. This is covered within the information and advice provided below.

A summarised version of the statutory budget process for 2020-21 is set out in the following table.

<p>Budget process</p> <p>The Mayor must prepare for each financial year a budget for each of the seven constituent bodies and a consolidated budget for the GLA Group as a whole (this is the GLA consolidated budget). For this purpose, the Mayor of London and London Assembly are treated as separate constituent bodies.</p>
<p>Before arriving at the final version of the budget, a “draft component budget” for each component body will be the subject of consultation with the constituent bodies. Letters from the Mayor fulfilling this requirement were sent to MOPAC, LFC, TfL, LLDC and OPDC on 20 November 2019. The Assembly set out its proposals for the GLA: Assembly budget on 16 October 2019 and was consulted on the Mayor’s draft proposed GLA: Mayor budget on 16 December 2019.</p>
<p>After preparation of and consultation on those drafts, the Mayor is required to prepare a draft of his proposed full consolidated budget for consultation with the Assembly. The Assembly had resolved that the Mayor should consult its Budget and Performance Committee. Such consultation has occurred, and the Committee considered that document on 7 January 2020. The Mayor is also required within the same timeframe to consult with other bodies or persons that he considered appropriate. This has also occurred.</p>
<p>Draft budget stage</p> <p>The Mayor then determines a “draft consolidated budget” (which contains draft component budgets for the seven bodies) publishes it and presents it to the Assembly at a public meeting. The draft budget that has been determined for 2020-21 is included at Part 2. The Assembly must approve this budget with or without amendment. Amendments at this stage of the process can be made by a simple majority of Assembly Members voting (ignoring abstentions and absentees). If no amendments are passed, then the draft budget is deemed by law to have been approved without amendment.</p>
<p>Final budget stage</p> <p>The Mayor will then prepare and publish a final draft of his proposed consolidated budget (“final draft budget”) for the next financial year. If the published final draft budget does not incorporate any amendments made by the Assembly at the previous stage or is otherwise different to the previous draft consolidated budget, the Mayor must lay a written statement before the Assembly giving reasons.</p>
<p>The final draft budget must be considered at a public meeting of the Assembly and approved with or without amendment before the last day of February. Any amendment must at this stage be agreed by at least two thirds of the Assembly Members voting.</p>

Budget process

If no amendments are passed, then the final draft budget is deemed by law to have been approved without amendment. The resulting budget will be the approved consolidated budget for the financial year 2020-21.

What were the arrangements for developing the budget proposals?

The budget process itself involved:

- budget guidance issued by the Mayor;
- budget development by functional bodies and both parts of the GLA;
- budget submissions scrutinised and approved by the functional bodies before formal submission to the Mayor;
- Mayor’s draft budget proposals considered, prepared and issued for public consultation; and
- scrutiny by the Assembly’s Budget and Performance Committee throughout the process.

The Mayor issued guidance in June 2019 to the Greater London Authority and the functional bodies for preparing their budget submissions. The guidance sought to ensure that the Mayor’s budget proposals were an accurate reflection of his priority aims and objectives within available resources and also covered how equalities and environmental impacts should be considered in the budget proposals.

There have been meetings and other consultation between functional bodies and GLA officers and these provided a vehicle to:

- review delivery of the 2019-20 budget and to judge outcomes;
- direct the 2020-21 budget process, ensuring that it remains valid and responsive to emerging needs and that budget information reflects the Mayor’s priorities;
- ensure that as far as practical there would be consistency and integration across the GLA Group on relevant issues;
- ensure that each body’s submission was delivered as required; and
- ensure that the submissions could be readily consolidated into the Mayor’s budget proposals and issued for consultation.

Throughout the process careful consideration has been given to the projected resource provision including responding to and taking into account Government consultations and announcements.

How can the estimates of income and expenditure be assessed as representing necessary and reasonable budget provisions?

To explain each component budget, there is generally a service analysis showing the spending plans for the four-year period 2020-21 to 2023-24 for the GLA and each of its functional bodies. Each service analysis shows:

- the net costs of providing the complete range of services provided by the body;
- sources of income;
- capital financing costs (including capital expenditure charged to revenue);
- transfers to and from reserves;
- any other financial changes and adjustments; and
- the resultant budget and council tax requirement.

Careful attention has been given to explaining the changes from the equivalent figures for 2019-20. Explanations have been provided for the changes in terms of:

- inflation;
- savings and efficiencies;
- net changes in service expenditure and income;
- changes in use of reserves;
- net change in government grants and retained business rates funding / resources allocated by the Mayor; and
- any other adjustments.

More detailed information has also been provided in the public documents relating to the budget proposals considered by the functional bodies and the Assembly’s Budget and Performance Committee.

What internal and external scrutiny have the budget proposals had?

The budget proposals are based on submissions that have been subject to scrutiny and approval within the functional bodies. Developing budget proposals have also been scrutinised by the Assembly’s Budget and Performance Committee and throughout the process further information has been provided in response to the Committee’s questions and recommendations.

Details of the budget consultation have been widely circulated to London borough councils, the City of London Corporation, London Councils, and a range of business and other representative organisations. The budget consultation document and details of how to respond to the consultation were also placed on the Greater London Authority’s website, enabling members of the public to submit their comments. The views expressed in the initial stages of the consultation have been considered before finalising the draft budget proposals. The final Draft Consolidated Budget will take into account a consideration of all of the responses received through the consultation process. A separate budget engagement process is also being undertaken through Talk London.

As the Budget and Performance Committee’s Response to the Mayor’s Consultation Budget was issued on 16 January 2020, the Mayor has not been able to consider the detailed recommendations by the time his Draft Consolidated Budget had to be issued. The Committee’s recommendations will be considered by the Mayor later in the process.

Conclusion

The estimates have been put together by, or with the involvement of, qualified finance staff in the functional bodies and the GLA and reflect the approval and scrutiny process as described above. The estimates represent the best available information held within the GLA about budget pressures and the resources available to meet them.

There are processes within each of the GLA Group’s constituent bodies for proper consideration to be given before expenditure is sanctioned. Budget discipline is supported by a controlled virement system that maximises resource utilisation and allows emerging needs to be taken into account.

There are areas of risk and uncertainty in the budget, particularly the system of business rates retention which increases the potential volatility in respect of some £3.2 billion of the GLA Group’s funding. There are significant savings included in the budget and these will require positive management action. There is always the risk that forecast budget variances for 2019-20 could result in a shortfall in the budget funding for 2020-21. In that event, the control systems that operate throughout the Group allow for component budgets to be reviewed and adjusted accordingly. The scale of future savings required across the GLA Group in future years continues to be substantial. This will require intensive work to deliver and will place significant strain on officers across the whole Group.

Risks are mitigated by insurance arrangements across the GLA Group and by the existence of appropriate reserves. Across the GLA Group the risks associated with major contracts have been recognised and programmes to manage these risks introduced.

The GLA Group takes a prudent approach to the achievability of income and recovery of debts due, making appropriate provision for bad debts, and full provision for realistic estimates of future settlements of known liabilities. The level of external borrowing by authorities is considered affordable having regard to these factors.

Overall, on the basis of the information that has been provided to explain the Mayor’s 2020-21 budget proposals, the estimates and budgetary provisions set out in the Budget documents represent reasonable and necessary financial provisions consistent with the powers and service obligations of the GLA and the functional bodies, and which are the outcome of a robust budget development process. Advice on equalities implications, 2019-20 monitoring, reserves and balances, council tax referendums, future years’ plans and the Assembly’s powers to amend the budget is also provided in this document.

2. Advice on the equalities implications of the budget proposals

The relevant sections of Part 2 of the Budget set out a summary of each member of the GLA Group's consideration of equality issues in their budget proposals. This equality statement covers the Mayor's budget proposals for the 2020-21 financial year.

The GLA (Mayor and Assembly) and all five functional bodies must comply with section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, which provides for the “public sector equality duty (PSED)”:

- this duty requires each body to have due regard to three outcomes: (1) the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; (2) to advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and (3) to foster good relations between such people;
- the protected characteristics covered by section 149 are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; sex; religion or belief; and sexual orientation, and in certain circumstances civil partnership or marriage;
- compliance with the PSED may involve, in particular, removing or minimising any disadvantage suffered by those who share a relevant protected characteristic, taking steps to meet the needs of such people and encouraging them to participate in public life or in any other activity where their participation is disproportionately low, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding; and
- in limited circumstances this may involve treating people with a protected characteristic more favourably than those without the characteristic, in particular, making reasonable adjustments for a disabled person and in some cases a pregnant worker can be treated more favourably. This is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under the Act.

Fulfilling the duty requires due regard that is appropriate in all relevant circumstances. This includes the budget development, preparation and approval process involving the GLA: Mayor, GLA: Assembly and each functional body and the subsequent expenditure involved in implementing their individual budget proposals.

Inclusive London is the Mayor's equality, diversity and inclusion strategy and includes relevant evidence and strategic objectives that set out what the GLA Group is aiming to achieve in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion. The strategy was published in May 2018. This goes beyond the nine protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010, and, in particular, considers socio-economic inequality.

Each member of the Group was directed by the Mayor to assess their budget proposals against the broad question of how they will affect poverty and economic inequality in London, as well as the impact of proposals on the specific protected groups.

The implementation of programmes and projects within the budget framework set by the budget for each body will be subject to a full and detailed assessment of the likely impact on individuals in protected groups before decisions are taken in accordance with the PSED and the *Inclusive London* strategy.

Funding allocations

The budget consultation document “GLA Group Budget Proposals and Precepts 2020-21” set out the Mayor’s proposed funding allocations to the constituent bodies. The funding allocations are not specifically aimed at persons who share a protected characteristic. However, it is recognised that changes to funding allocations compared to the previous year could, without mitigating action and depending on the spending decisions made by the bodies themselves, potentially have an adverse impact on persons who share a protected characteristic - including through impacts on discrimination and other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010; equality of opportunity; good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and the socio-economic status of groups and individuals.

The Mayor’s proposed funding allocations for 2020-21 compared with the previous year are set out in section 1 of Part 2. In summary, the Mayor’s proposed funding allocations:

- provide the functional bodies with as much certainty as possible over funding sources that are themselves uncertain and volatile;
- provide additional funding to MOPAC through increasing the Band D police element of the GLA precept by £4.85, in accordance with existing Government assumptions, and maintaining its core retained business rates funding;
- provide additional funding to LFC by allocating the additional income raised from the 1.99 per cent increase in the non-police precept and £230.7 million in retained business rates funding. This level of retained rates funding is £19.9 million above the baseline for the fire and rescue element of the GLA’s settlement funding assessment (which has been rolled into the GLA’s retained business rates income since 2017-18);
- hold TfL’s council tax requirement at the same cash level as in 2019-20 and allocating business rates funding of over £1.9 billion which partially replaces capital and operating grant which it formerly received through Department for Transport grant;
- decrease the resources allocated to OPDC from £11.8 million in 2019-20 to £7.8 million in 2020-21, and LLDC, from £34.3 million to £32.6 million on a like-for-like basis with the net costs of the London Stadium being shown in the revenue budget, whilst maintaining a Mayoral Development Corporation Reserve; and
- broadly maintain the resources available to the GLA at similar levels to 2019-20 after adjusting for the profiled spending of the strategic investment fund, the additional financing costs for Crossrail and other more minor changes.

Other revenues

The funding allocations are not the only source of income for the constituent bodies. They are also supported through locally raised and retained fees and charges including public transport fares and the congestion charge for TfL, as well as through a range of other Government grants for specific purposes. Any resulting reduction in a constituent body’s income could have an effect on the ability of that body to incur expenditure on, in particular, advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The impact will depend on the choices made by the constituent body and in making those choices the body is required to comply with the public-sector equality duty and also, as directed by the Mayor, the objectives set out in *Inclusive London* (including the question of how it will affect socio-economic inequality in London).

If the constituent bodies cannot mitigate any shortfall in funding through making efficiencies, pooling resources or other means, then services may have to be stopped, scaled back or re-shaped. Given that the constituent bodies provide a wide range of services, targeting or impacting upon persons who share a protected characteristic, there could be an impact upon such persons or groups as a result.

Impact of funding allocations and other revenues

It is not possible to predict how the proposed budget changes for 2020-21 will impact on specific persons who share a protected characteristic as this will be dependent on the decisions made by each constituent body on the allocation of its funding allocation from the Mayor and its other revenues. In exercising their functions, including when making policy and spending decisions, the constituent bodies are required to comply with the public sector equality duty and strategic objectives set out in *Inclusive London*. This duty is necessarily iterative and on-going. It includes carrying out a process to identify and actively consider potential detrimental impacts (if any) that may arise for individual protected groups and what mitigations (if any) could be implemented to address them at a level proportionate to the decision being taken. The constituent bodies will continue to undertake this at a budget level and in the implementation of their individual policies, programmes and projects.

The Mayor’s proposed funding allocations do provide some mitigation of the potential impacts on persons who share a protected characteristic. They have been determined following a lengthy budget development process which has included the constituent bodies responding to budget guidance issued by the Mayor with budget submissions scrutinised and approved by them before formal submission to the Mayor. Throughout this process constituent bodies have been encouraged to consider equality and diversity issues and they have taken their own steps to comply with the public sector equality duty and the objectives set out in *Inclusive London*. An initial high-level summary of the equality implications of each constituent body was set out in the budget consultation document “GLA Group Budget Proposals and Precepts 2020-21”, published in December 2019.

Also, the funding allocations provide funding protections for the functional bodies by providing them with as much certainty as possible over funding sources that are themselves uncertain and volatile; increasing funding for the police through increases in the precept; providing additional funding to the LFC through the precept and business rates; and passing on in full the retained business rates for TfL which has replaced former Government operating and investment grants; and managing the uncertainties inherent in the retained business rates system through the Mayor’s Business Rates Reserve.

Impact of increasing the council tax precept

For 2020-21, a financially balanced budget is proposed based on various new initiatives and service improvements, savings and efficiencies, income changes and use of reserves across all the constituent bodies.

The Mayor proposes an increase in the Band D precept paid by residents of the 32 London Boroughs from £320.51 to £326.92 – a rise of £6.41 or 1.99 per cent. This reflects the Mayor’s additional funding allocated to MOPAC through a 1.99 per cent increase in the police element of the precept and a 1.99 per cent increase in the non-police precept. The proposed 2020-21 Band D precept for the Common Council of the City of London, which is outside the Metropolitan Police district, is £79.94 – 1.99 per cent greater than in 2019-20.

Council tax is a regressive tax because the size of property does not equate to size of income of the occupier and the occupiers of the most expensive properties only pay twice the level of council tax paid for the average Band D property.

The Mayor has carefully considered this in proposing his precept increase and has taken the difficult decision to increase the precept and provide additional funding to the Metropolitan Police and London Fire Brigade, in the light of his manifesto commitment to increase the council tax where it is necessary to keep Londoners safe. It should also be noted that the majority of the council tax increase is being implemented to safeguard police numbers and that crime disproportionately affects those who have lower levels of income, with the remainder of the increase being used to ensure the London fire service is adequately funded.

The impact on council tax payers of the Mayor’s proposals will depend on their household make up, whether the property is empty or used as a second home and whether they pay council tax in full, in part or are exempt from payment due to their household income or personal circumstances.

The GLA element of the council tax will increase for all individuals who pay council tax (although this could be compounded by increases in the billing authority element of the council tax, particularly for adult social care, but dependent on each individual billing authority’s council tax proposals). The additional amount payable will be dependent on the council tax banding of the council tax payer’s relevant property and any reductions the council tax payer is entitled to under the billing authority’s council tax support scheme. The £6.41 (£1.56 for taxpayers in the City of London) increase to the Mayor’s precept applies to properties in Band D. A household whose bill falls in Bands A to C or E to H will pay proportionately less or more respectively.

This is set out in the table below.

Adjusted amount of council tax paid by taxpayers in the 32 London boroughs (£)

Band	2020-21	2019-20	Change
Band A	£217.95	£213.67	£4.28
Band B	£254.27	£249.29	£4.98
Band C	£290.60	£284.90	£5.70
Band D	£326.92	£320.51	£6.41
Band E	£399.57	£391.73	£7.84
Band F	£472.22	£462.96	£9.26
Band G	£544.87	£534.18	£10.69
Band H	£653.84	£641.02	£12.82

The GLA does not have equalities data covering the population spread across the council tax bands of individuals with protected characteristics including socio-economic status. However, it can probably be assumed that individuals with lower incomes are, in general, more likely to live in property that falls in the lower bands, thus reducing the monetary impact on such individuals of the council tax increase.

Council tax support

Households which are exempt from paying council tax or who are eligible for council tax support for 100 per cent of their bill will experience no direct impact from an increase in council tax.

However, the availability of full council tax support varies depending on the council tax payer’s place of residence and whether they have reached or are below their pension credit qualifying age. Since 2013-14 decision-making on the award of council tax support for working age households has been localised to individual billing authorities. These policies are determined in London by each of the 32 London boroughs and the Corporation of London. It is a statutory requirement for billing authorities to consult major precepting authorities (in London this is the GLA) on changes to council tax support policies; however, each billing authority is ultimately responsible for the design of its scheme, within the legislative framework set out by Government.

Under the localised system, eligible pensioner households continue to receive council tax support as previously under council tax benefit, but billing authorities are free to introduce their own local schemes for working age claimants below pension credit age. Of the 33 London billing authorities, in 2019-20 five have protected working age claimants by providing full council tax support on broadly the same basis as prior to 2013-14, subject to applicable uprating for inflation and other parallel changes in national policies for means tested benefits. The remainder have locally-designed schemes which require some or all working age claimants to contribute to the cost of the scheme by paying a share of their council tax liability or through adjustments to other criteria. For example, in some cases any impact is restricted to council tax payers in higher property bands, or who are not members of defined groups deemed more vulnerable.

Council tax support schemes for 2020-21 are not required to be confirmed until 11 March 2020. The GLA will therefore not have details of all council tax support schemes in London until after the Mayor’s budget has been set.

In 2020-21, based on consultation proposals issued so far, the GLA understands that the minimum contribution for working age claimants in some boroughs could again be as much as 30 per cent of their council tax liability; although in nearly one third of boroughs working age claimants on the lowest incomes are eligible to receive up to 100 per cent support. In some authorities council tax support entitlement is restricted only up to the equivalent Band D rate and therefore working age claimants residing in properties in Bands E to H do not receive additional support for the difference.

As stated above there are often more generous council tax support policies applied to certain defined groups. For example, while some authorities apply their policies consistently to all working age claimants others offer greater levels of support to certain categories of claimant considered more vulnerable (e.g. disabled people, lone parents with young children and individuals in receipt of a war widow’s or war disablement pension). A majority of boroughs have also removed or scaled back the 25 per cent second adult rebate for two-person adult households where one adult is on a low income. Savings limits, above which council tax support is withdrawn in full for working age households, vary from £6,000 to the default national guideline of £16,000 (which applies to pensioner claimants) in different boroughs.

Those who will feel the greatest impact from the increase in council tax are likely to be those whose circumstances mean that they are only slightly above the level at which they would become eligible for some council tax support. It is not possible to give a threshold of savings or income (or similar) below which an individual would be eligible for council tax support, or above which a person will not be eligible for council tax support because of the way in which benefits are calculated, the number of factors that must be taken into account, and the different schemes in operation in the London boroughs. However, it is likely that those whose financial circumstances place them only just above their local council tax support eligibility threshold will also have low levels of income/savings, relative to the rest of the population.

Eligibility for council tax support will therefore vary across London as it will depend on the local scheme determined by each London billing authority. In designing their schemes these authorities are required to consult with stakeholders when they make changes and are required to have regard to equalities legislation and duties when approving them.

The GLA does not have equalities data in respect of the 33 local council tax support schemes in London at individual property level which could be used to inform an assessment of the likely percentage of people in this group having a particular protected characteristic. Although, probably it can be assumed that, in general, those with lower income/savings relative to the rest of the population (but nevertheless above their local council tax support eligibility threshold) will include greater proportions of disabled people; black, Asian and minority ethnic groups; lone parents (who are normally women); and families with young children than are present in the Greater London population as a whole. The increase in council tax marginally reduces their disposable income in both cash and real terms. For a working age claimant on a low income paying a minimum liability of 33 per cent (in a borough where that applies) the increase in the Mayor’s precept would equate to less than 3 pence per week assuming they lived in a Band D property and were the sole adult liable to pay council tax in the household.

As noted above, the majority of the council tax increase is being introduced to safeguard police numbers and that crime disproportionately affects those who have lower levels of income, with the remainder of the increase being used to ensure the London fire service is adequately funded.

These variations in the schemes arise because of the Government’s decision to localise decision making on the setting of council tax support. This means that working age claimants are subject to significant variations in their entitlements depending on where they live and the resources available to, and choices made by, their billing authority.

Impact of freezing all Transport for London fares for four years, the freezing of concessionary fares and the introduction of the ‘Hopper’ fare

The budget plans include the impact of the Mayor’s decision to freeze all TfL fares at 2016 levels for four years. At the time the original decision was made, TfL forecast that an average household would have saved around £200 over the four-year period from the start of 2017 to the end of 2020.

The freeze in TfL fares means that everyone buying a bus or tram ticket in London will pay no more in 2020 than they did in 2016. Pay as you go (PAYG) journeys on the Tube, DLR, Emirates Airline and rail services where TfL fares apply have been frozen. Hire and access charges for Santander Cycles have also been frozen.

In partnership with London Councils and the 33 local councils, the Mayor has maintained all TfL travel concessions, providing more than £300 million worth of free or discounted travel every year to children, people over 60 (subject to a small annual administration fee for the 60+ Oyster card), those on income support, and other socially disadvantaged groups. The level of service provided through the Dial-a-Ride and Taxicard schemes to eligible older persons and disabled people will also be maintained.

In addition, the Mayor introduced the ‘Hopper’ fare in 2016 allowing customers to make an extra bus journey free, as long as it is within one hour of touching in on the first bus. This was extended in early 2018 to allow unlimited bus and tram transfers within the hour.

As part of the decision-making process in regards to the introduction of the fares freeze, TfL identified six groups of Londoners who typically face increased barriers to public transport use. These groups were black, Asian and minority-ethnic (BAME) Londoners, women, older Londoners, younger Londoners, Londoners on low incomes (who tend to be women and older, BAME and disabled people, and those not in work), and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Londoners. Londoners with protected characteristics who are likely to be affected by increases in fares, such as those on low incomes or those who rely on public transport, will especially benefit. However, the increases to Travelcard prices mandated by the train operating companies (TOCs) in line with inflation are likely to have an adverse impact.

Many of those who comprise the six groups above are likely to benefit from free travel concessions or discounted fares. All current concessionary fare schemes are being maintained in order to keep public transport accessible to people who face barriers to public transport use, and thereby offset or mitigate any detrimental impacts. From January 2021, TfL’s plan assumes that fares rise by around the retail price index plus one per cent, to support vital investment in public transport. This is only a business planning assumption by TfL as fares are set by the Mayor on an annual basis. The impact of any fare increase will be considered in detail, when final decisions are made on future years’ fares.

3. Advice on 2019-20 financial monitoring

What are the arrangements for monitoring in the GLA and the functional bodies?

In his 2020-21 Budget Guidance issued in June 2019, the Mayor set out the requirement that the GLA and its functional bodies improve the timeliness and quality of information in their quarterly monitoring reports. In particular, the aim is that all quarterly monitoring reports will include both financial and performance information. The Budget Guidance also required the integration of capital and revenue planning together in each functional body’s quarterly report.

These requirements built on the robust systems already in place for regular financial monitoring and reporting within each member of the GLA Group. The reports detail spending against profiled estimates and provide explanations of significant variances and proposals for any necessary corrective action. Progress on new initiatives, performance against key indicators and outturn estimates against approved budgets are also identified and explained. As the requirements of the users of the reports evolve, the format and content are being adjusted. This is an iterative process that is developed as new requirements are identified and the processes required to collate the necessary data are established.

Meetings between the Mayoral team and the GLA and each of its functional bodies are held to consider the quarterly reports. These include discussion of progress with identifying and realising efficiencies and savings as well as potential future variances from budget. Regular officer meetings between the GLA and each functional body are held to discuss the budget process and to advise of any subsequent developments and resolve any queries that might arise. The reports are submitted on a quarterly basis to the Assembly’s Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee for each GLA Group member and scrutinised by the Sub-Committee.

Part 2 sets out the forecast outturn for each functional body for 2019-20 although it should be noted that these figures are likely to change before the end of the financial year.

Conclusion

An assessment of the current year’s financial outturn is an important element in budgetary and precept deliberations for the forthcoming year. With further spending activity still to take place in respect of this financial year up to 31 March 2020 and with crucial transactions taking place beyond that date in finalising the accounts for the GLA and the functional bodies, it is not possible to say that other variations will not arise.

The processes in place throughout the GLA Group and the responsibilities placed on each Chief Finance Officer do however ensure that the outturn position is closely monitored, controlled and taken into account in preparing the estimates of income and expenditure for 2020-21. In particular, each body monitors progress against delivery of their budget and business plans, instigating any necessary remedial action. In turn, this monitoring is reported and reviewed by GLA finance officers and considered by both the Mayor and the Assembly on a regular basis.

Processes are also in place to ensure expenditure is controlled within the resources finally approved for each organisation. If any significant changes to the outturn forecasts emerge in the latest round of monitoring, advice will be provided in time for consideration of the Mayor’s final draft budget proposals.

4. Advice on reserves and balances

Section 25(1) (b) of the Local Government Act 2003 places a duty on the Executive Director of Resources, as the GLA’s statutory Chief Finance Officer, to report on the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. This is covered within the information and advice provided below.

What are reserves and balances?

When reviewing their medium-term financial plans and preparing their annual budgets, local authorities should consider the establishment and maintenance of reserves.

Reserves can be held for three main purposes:

- a working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing – this forms part of **general reserves**;
- a contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies – this forms part of **general reserves**; and

- a means of building up funds to meet known or predicted requirements – this is often referred to as **earmarked reserves**.

What are the appropriate amounts to be held in reserves?

The existing legislation requires authorities to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement. It is the responsibility of the Chief Finance Officer to advise the authority about the level of reserves it should hold and to ensure that there are clear protocols for their establishment and use.

The protocols should set out:

- the reason for/purpose of the reserve;
- how and when the reserve can be used;
- procedures for the reserve’s management and control; and
- a process and timescale for review of the reserve to ensure continuing relevance and adequacy.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) has published guidance on local authority reserves and balances. The Institute’s view is that *“a generally applicable minimum level [of reserves] is inappropriate, as a minimum level of reserve will only be imposed where an authority is not following best financial practice”*.

The Institute confirms that *“local authorities should establish reserves including the level of those reserves based on the advice of their chief finance officers”*, and that *“authorities should make their own judgements on such matters taking into account all the relevant local circumstances”*. In assessing the adequacy of reserves, the Chief Finance Officer should take account of the strategic, operational and financial risks facing the authority, as well as the importance of considering medium-term plans and forecasts of resources, in addition to short-term considerations.

Section 26 of the Local Government Act 2003 gives Ministers in England and Wales a general power to set a minimum level of reserves. However, the Government has undertaken to apply this only to individual authorities in circumstances where an authority does not act prudently, disregards the advice of its Chief Financial Officer and is heading for serious financial difficulty.

An authority’s external auditor also has a responsibility to review the arrangements in place to ensure that financial standing is soundly based. This includes reviewing and reporting on the level of reserves, taking into account their local knowledge of the authority’s financial performance over a period of time. It is not the external auditor’s responsibility to prescribe the optimum or minimum level of reserves for an individual authority or authorities in general.

Advice: Below is advice on reserves and balances for the GLA and each of the functional bodies reflecting advice received from their own statutory Chief Finance Officers. Further commentary on reserves is outlined within the GLA and each functional body’s section in Part 2, as well as their individual published budget proposals.

(a) Greater London Authority: Mayor of London

No changes are proposed to the GLA’s policy on reserves and the policy will be kept under review during 2020-21. The impact of the business rates retention pool in London, the effect of business rate payer appeals, and the upside and downside risks associated with council tax income will continue to be closely monitored. This will help ensure that volatility in the level of business rates retained by the GLA and in council tax income can be effectively dealt with, as well as ensuring that the Mayor’s priorities can be implemented.

General reserves

At 31 March 2020 the GLA’s general reserves balance is forecast to total £10.0 million and this balance is assumed at this stage to remain constant through to the end of 2023-24. This is in line with the GLA’s policy to maintain a minimum general reserve balance of £10.0 million.

Capital programme reserve

A capital programme reserve has been established to support capital investment on the Mayor’s priorities, including affordable housing, energy and environment, which fall outside of schemes funded by central government. It is forecast to have a closing balance of £38.1 million at 31 March 2020. In 2020-21 and subsequent years it is forecast to reduce over the planning period, reaching £23.4 million in 2023-24. The level of the reserve is monitored in light of developments in the capital programme and other funding sources; plans for future years are reviewed as part of the budget process each year.

Earmarked reserves

In 2020-21 significant drawdowns from earmarked reserves are planned to fund the cost of the 2020 GLA elections, events associated with the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship and for the Young Londoners Fund. The balance on reserves earmarked for GLA services are forecast to reduce to £85.1 million by 2023-24. Plans are being developed on how this remaining sum will be allocated.

Strategic Investment Fund reserve

The Strategic Investment Fund reserve has been set up to manage the use of the £172.6 million in retained business rates income, the overall level of additional growth generated from the 2018-19 and 2019-20 business rates pilots. The reserve is forecast to be £154.6 million at the end of 2019-20. The balance on this reserve is expected to be reduced to zero by the end of 2021-22.

Mayoral Development Corporations and LLDC Capital Funding Reserve

The Mayoral Development Corporations (MDC) Reserve includes provisions held to support LLDC and OPDC expenditure; neither body holds their own reserves. The reserve is forecast to be £9.5 million at the end of 2019-20. By the end of 2021-22 the reserve is forecast to reduce to £3.6 million. This represents a prudent level of reserves held to provide support, should it be required.

The LLDC Capital Funding Reserve is expected to total £145.2 million at the end of March 2020 falling to nil by 31 March 2022 and is used to support the development of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and surrounding area.

Business Rates Reserve

The balance on the Business Rates Reserve is forecast to be £170.0 million at the close of 2019-20. By the end of 2020-21 the reserve will increase to £188.2 million and is budgeted to remain at the same level throughout the period to 2023-24. The Business Rates Reserve is used to manage business rates income risk. The forecast balance on the reserve reflects current assumptions of its adequacy; its level is based on a percentage of expenditure equivalent to the largest change seen between the GLA’s share of the business rates as forecast by the billing authorities and actual outturn, since the introduction of the localised retained rates system. The appropriate level to hold in the reserve will be further reviewed once the business rates forecasts for 2020-21 are received from the London Boroughs at the end of January 2020 and reported in the Mayor’s final draft budget.

Greater London Authority: London Assembly

Some of the GLA’s non-election related reserves relate to accommodation or to other cost issues such as legal fees, the environment and estates, and the Assembly and its staff effectively have access to these reserves on the same basis as the rest of the GLA. The Mayor’s proposed budget includes a forecast earmarked Assembly Development and Resettlement Reserve forecast to be £0.9 million at the end of March 2020. The main purpose of this reserve is to fund resettlement costs when Assembly Members leave office. This reserve is set to increase to £1.5 million, in order to meet anticipated pressures, by the end of 2023-24.

GLA conclusion

The Chief Finance Officer of the GLA judges the GLA’s level of reserves to be prudent in the context of known future liabilities, risks and funding uncertainties facing the Authority and will be kept under review, particularly in the light of the volatility of locally retained business rates.

(b) Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)

MOPAC is forecasting general reserves of £46.6 million as at 31 March 2020; this level of reserves is forecast to be maintained across the budget period to 2023-24. MOPAC’s policy is to hold general reserves of at least 1.3 per cent of net revenue expenditure; this level of reserves represents 1.3 per cent of the forecast outturn net revenue expenditure in 2019-20, in line with MOPAC’s policy.

Earmarked reserves are forecast to reduce from £329.2 million at the end of 2019-20 to £277.2 million at the end of 2020-21 and to be reduced further to £83.9 million at the end of 2023-24. Earmarked reserves are being held for specific purposes, including £118.6 million earmarked to provide funding in future years for an additional 1,000 officers, as well as investment in the Met’s transformation and change programme, and managing one-off impacts to the medium-term budget. The forecast total balance by 2023-24 reflects planned spend on the programmes for which the reserves are held.

MOPAC conclusion

In the opinion of MOPAC’s Chief Finance Officer the proposed approach remains prudent and MOPAC will have in place adequate earmarked reserves and general reserves.

(c) London Fire Commissioner (LFC)

LFC’s general reserves at 31 March 2020 are forecast to be £15.5 million. They are assumed to remain at the same level across the period to 2023-24. These reserves are based on a level equivalent to 3.5 per cent of the current financial year’s budget, in line with LFC’s policy.

It is forecast that LFC will hold £57.0 million of earmarked reserves at 31 March 2020; these reserves will reduce to £43.3 million by the end of March 2021 and then decrease in each of the following years to £14.5 million by the end of March 2023-24, as the budget flexibility reserve is fully drawn down.

The level of reserves will be kept under review and will reflect any updated assessments of financial risks.

LFC conclusion

The level of reserves is judged prudent by the Chief Finance Officer of the LFC in the context of known future liabilities, risks and funding uncertainties facing the organisation and will be kept under review.

(d) Transport for London (TfL)

At 31 March 2020 TfL forecasts general reserves of £150.0 million. These are forecast to increase to £500 million by 31 March 2021 and then remain at the same level throughout the period to 2023-24. TfL also maintains a minimum prudent level of cash and short-term investments of around £1,200 million, equivalent to two months of operating costs, to ensure that it has sufficient liquidity to meet its financial obligations.

TfL forecasts earmarked reserves of £1,618.2 million at the end of 2019-20, reducing to £1,131.2 million in 2020-21; by the end of the period earmarked reserves are forecast at a level of £1,653.5 million in 2023-24. The earmarked reserves are held for capital spending purposes and their movement reflects planned spending on TfL’s capital programme, outlined in TfL’s latest Business Plan.

TfL conclusion

The Chief Finance Officer of TfL considers that the level of reserves is appropriate to meet general requirements in the context of known future liabilities, risks and funding uncertainties facing the Corporation.

(e) London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC)

As at 31 March 2020 LLDC will not hold any reserves. The LLDC’s historic reserves are held within the MDC and LLDC Capital Funding Reserves, part of the GLA’s reserves. LLDC’s revenue expenditure and a significant proportion of its capital programme are funded by the GLA, the latter through direct grant contributions and a rolling loan facility. The loan is anticipated to be repaid through capital receipts from the sale of development land. The LLDC and GLA carefully manage upside and downside risks associated with LLDC’s expenditure and the impact of any such risks can be managed within the GLA budget generally and specifically through the use of contingency sums held within the budget and where necessary through the usage of the MDC Reserve.

LLDC conclusion

The Chief Finance Officer of the LLDC, taking into account the management of any upside and downside risk through LLDC’s own budget and noting the support of the GLA as set out above, considers that the level of reserves held within the MDC Reserve is prudent in the context of current known liabilities, but this will need to be kept under review in the light of future funding needs.

(f) Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC)

OPDC has no reserves. A contingency is held within the earmarked MDC Reserve held by the GLA, as outlined above.

OPDC conclusion

The Chief Finance Officer of OPDC, having taken into account that it has potential access to the Mayor’s MDC Reserve, considers that the reserves position is prudent, but will need to be kept under review in the light of future funding needs.

General conclusion

The above advice reflects the differing nature of the services provided by each organisation. Each body operates independently with its own statutory responsibilities for the proper administration of its financial affairs. The GLA’s Executive Director of Resources relies on the individual advice from each of the Chief Finance Officers of the functional bodies in discharging his responsibilities.

The forecast use of reserves to March 2024 is summarised in the table below.

	GLA	MOPAC	LFC	TfL	LLDC	OPDC	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	
Opening balances 1 April 2019	721.2	230.6	75.4	1,606.5	0.0	0.0	2,633.8
Movement on Earmarked reserves	-13.8	145.1	4.8	161.7	0.0	0.0	297.8
Movement on General reserves	0.0	0.0	-7.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	-7.7
Balances 31 March 2020	707.4	375.7	72.6	1,768.2	0.0	0.0	2,923.9
Movement on Earmarked reserves	-179.5	-51.9	-13.7	-487.0	0.0	0.0	-732.1
Movement on General reserves	0.0	0.0	0.0	350.0	0.0	0.0	350.0
Balances 31 March 2021	527.9	323.8	58.9	1,631.2	0.0	0.0	2,541.8
Movement on Earmarked reserves	-201.4	-109.4	-26.2	-213.5	0.0	0.0	-550.5
Movement on General reserves	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Balances 31 March 2022	326.5	214.4	32.7	1,417.7	0.0	0.0	1,991.3
Movement on Earmarked reserves	-8.8	-76.5	-1.8	566.1	0.0	0.0	479.0
Movement on General reserves	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Balances 31 March 2023	317.7	137.9	30.9	1,983.8	0.0	0.0	2,470.3
Movement on Earmarked reserves	-6.0	-7.4	-0.8	169.7	0.0	0.0	155.5
Movement on General reserves	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Balances 31 March 2024	311.7	130.5	30.1	2,153.5	0.0	0.0	2,625.8

There are forecast reductions in the reserves of the GLA, MOPAC, TfL and LFC between 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2024. This results in a net overall reduction of £298.1 million from 31 March 2020 to 31 March 2024, reflecting the planned use of earmarked reserves. Of the forecast balance on reserves of £2,923.9 million at 31 March 2020, around £222.1 million is held in general reserves – including £150.0 million for TfL.

In conclusion, the Mayor’s budget proposals are consistent with the advice provided on reserves and balances. The use of reserves and balances will continue to be kept under close review during 2020-21 and in future years.

5. Advice on council tax requirements and referendums

Component and consolidated council tax requirements

The Mayor must calculate council tax requirements for the Mayor, the Assembly, and the five functional bodies. These component council tax requirements for the Mayor, Assembly and functional bodies together constitute the GLA Group’s consolidated council tax requirement (s.85 and Schedule 6 (“Schedule 6”), paragraph 1, Greater London Authority Act 1999 (GLA Act)).

Procedure for determining the council tax requirements

The determination of the component and consolidated council tax requirements has taken place following the publication of the Government’s provisional local government finance settlement.

The council tax requirement for each body is calculated by determining the difference between projected expenditure, and projected income excluding income from any precept. Insofar as expenditure will exceed income, that amount is the body’s component council tax requirement for the year (s.85 (6) GLA Act). The Mayor must also consult the Assembly and functional bodies and others as appear appropriate to the Mayor before preparing the draft component budgets for the Assembly and functional bodies (s.87 and paragraph 2 of Schedule 6 GLA Act and s.65 Local Government Finance Act 1992).

What are the rules on council tax referendums?

The GLA budgetary process is to a large extent governed by the provisions of sections 85, 86 and 87 and Schedule 6 of the GLA Act and Chapter 4ZA of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended. The effect is that there is a requirement for a council tax referendum where the proposed increase in the GLA precept exceeds the threshold set out in the local government excessiveness principles laid by the Secretary of State and approved by the House of Commons for the same financial year as the budget.

As a result of the way the Metropolitan and City of London police forces are funded, the GLA is required to calculate two different “relevant basic amounts of council tax” (on the basis of the council tax Band D) for the City of London (the unadjusted basic amount of council tax) and the 32 London boroughs (the adjusted basic amount of council tax). Both these amounts must be in compliance with the Government’s excessiveness principles if a council tax referendum is to be avoided.

If either or both council tax calculations exceed the threshold under the excessiveness principles (e.g. even if only the calculation applying to the City of London exceeds it), a referendum of local electors across the 32 London boroughs must be held. If the adjusted basic amount of council tax only is excessive under these principles electors in the area covered by the Corporation of London do not participate in the referendum but if the unadjusted amount is excessive, they do alongside electors in the rest of London. The Mayor is under a duty to determine whether either or both of the two council tax figures are excessive under the principles applying to the GLA.

On 20 December 2019 alongside the provisional local government finance settlement the Government published the draft regulations setting out the council tax referendum thresholds for 2020-21 – the ‘Referendums Relating to Council Tax Increases (Principles) (England) Report 2020-21.’ This included the draft principle for the GLA’s unadjusted relevant basic amount; but did not include a figure for the adjusted amount, as the provisional police settlement had not been published at that stage. At the time this document was published the Government had yet to announce the principle for the adjusted amount due to the delay in provisional police settlement.

On the basis of these draft principles for the GLA a referendum would be required if the unadjusted amount of council tax (i.e. the non-police precept) were increased by 2 per cent or more. Based on current assumptions, a referendum would be required if the adjusted amount of council tax (i.e. the total Band D precept payable in the 32 boroughs) were increased by 2 per cent or more, the current assumption of the principle for the adjusted amount. The House of Commons is expected to approve the final regulations alongside the Local Government Finance report during February 2020.

The GLA is not required to make levy payments to levying bodies – as for example applies for London boroughs in respect of the Environment Agency, Lee Valley Park Authority and the London Pensions Fund Authority – and therefore the baseline against which the principles are measured is the actual unadjusted and adjusted council tax figure for 2020-21.

Position regarding the City of London

The unadjusted basic amount of council tax proposed by the Mayor for 2020-21 in his draft budget is £79.94 for a Band D property – which is the sum payable by council tax payers in the City of London. This is £1.56 higher than in 2019-20.

Position regarding the 32 London boroughs

The adjusted basic amount of council tax proposed by the Mayor for 2020-21 in his draft budget is £326.92 for a Band D property (i.e. £246.98 for the Metropolitan Police plus £79.94 for non-police services) – this is the sum payable by taxpayers in the 32 London boroughs. This is £6.41 or 1.99 per cent higher than the corresponding figure for 2019-20 of £320.51.

The adjusted and unadjusted amounts of council tax are therefore both lower than the GLA’s estimate of the council tax referendum thresholds that we currently anticipate will apply for 2020-21 (i.e. £326.93 and £79.95).

Substitute budget

In the event that the final draft budget did not comply with the principles, the Mayor would be required to present, additionally, a substitute budget that did comply. This, subject to any amendments agreed by the required two thirds majority in the final draft budget, would become the default budget if the referendum seeking approval for an increase above the threshold was lost. On current assumptions about the adjusted principle that would apply, this substitute budget would be in effect one consistent with an unadjusted council tax of £79.94 (in the area of the City of London) and/or an adjusted council tax of £326.92 (in the 32 London Boroughs) depending on which (or both) council tax amount(s) is/are “excessive”. These being the council tax amounts proposed by the Mayor in this draft budget.

The Mayor’s final draft budget in this scenario would then be subject to a London-wide referendum (even if the “excessive” increase only applied to the precept payable by taxpayers in the area of the City of London). If the final draft budget was rejected in that referendum, then the alternative substitute final budget would become the final budget for the year. No such substitute budget has been prepared as the Mayor is proposing a precept level which, on present information and expectations, would not trigger a referendum.

On the basis of the information available to the GLA at the date of publication, the council tax levels proposed by the Mayor in this draft budget are compliant with the published excessiveness principle for the unadjusted amount and the assumed principle for the unadjusted amount. Therefore the principles would not trigger a council tax referendum in either the 32 London boroughs (the area where taxpayers are liable to pay the adjusted relevant basic amount of council tax) or the area of the Common Council of the City of London (the area where taxpayers are liable to pay the unadjusted figure).

6. Advice on future plans

What are the medium-term planning arrangements?

The overall aim of the GLA’s medium-term planning arrangements is to have financial plans and business plans that are based on Mayoral objectives and priorities. This means ensuring that there are sound medium-term financial plans within which all priorities and objectives are adequately funded. The Mayor issues guidance each year to ensure this objective is fully implemented across the GLA Group.

Appendix I of Part 2 of the Budget sets out the prospects for the GLA and GLA Group for future years. It emphasises that there remains much uncertainty about the prospects over the next few years. Therefore, in setting council tax requirement levels for 2020-21 the Mayor and the Assembly should have regard not just to the in-year funding position for 2020-21 but the expectation that overall resources to the GLA Group may be under pressure following the impact of the 2020 Spending Review, and implementation of the Fair Funding Review and reforms to the business rates retention system.

7. Advice on the limit on the Assembly’s power to amend the Mayor’s council tax requirement for the Assembly

What is the council tax requirement for the Assembly?

The GLA is required to determine a separate council tax requirement for both the Mayor and the Assembly.

What is the restriction on the Assembly changing its own council tax requirement?

The Mayor proposes a council tax requirement for the Assembly as part of his Draft Budget. The Assembly may amend this but does not have to. However, the GLA Act places limits on the extent to which the Assembly can amend its own component requirement by reference to changes – up or down (if any) – in the budget for the Mayor’s council tax requirement figure, as compared to the previous financial year:

- If the Mayoral council tax requirement figure increases, then the Assembly cannot amend the budget to increase its own component council tax requirement figure by a greater percentage; or
- If the Mayoral council tax requirement figure decreases, then the Assembly’s amendment to its own council tax requirement (if any) can be equal to but not less than percentage decrease made by the Mayor to his own council tax requirement i.e. the Mayoral decrease acts as a ceiling on any Assembly decrease.

The GLA Act uses the terms OM and NM in defining how this works in practice i.e. ‘Old’ Mayor and ‘New’ Mayor:

- ‘Old’ Mayor will be the notional council tax requirement for the Mayor for 2019-20;
- ‘New’ Mayor will be the Mayor’s proposed council tax requirement for the Mayor for 2020-21 after any adjustments made; and
- The percentage change in the Mayor’s council tax requirement from 2019-20 is calculated using these amounts.

The Assembly’s council tax requirement for 2019-20 is then adjusted by the same percentage. This figure then becomes the **‘adjusted previous component council tax requirement for the Assembly.’**

How is a like for like comparison ensured?

To facilitate a like for like comparison the Chief Finance Officer may direct amounts to be included or excluded from the comparison of the Mayor’s council tax requirement for the Mayor with the notional council tax requirement for the Mayor for the preceding year. The Chief Finance Officer must have regard to any Secretary of State guidance on the direction (GLA Act Schedule 6, paragraph 5A).

Chief Finance Officer’s direction

The Secretary of State has not issued any guidance on the direction and the Executive Director of Resources has directed that there are no adjustments he requires to facilitate a like for like comparison.

Can the Assembly amend the Mayor’s council tax requirement for the Assembly?

Using the GLA Act’s methodology and applying it to the draft council tax requirement figures, the Assembly could not amend their own council tax requirement so that it would increase, as the Mayor is proposing a Mayoral council tax requirement in 2020-21 which is £0.002 million lower than in 2019-20.

This is explained in the table below.

Mayor’s Budget: Calculation of NM and OM	£m
Proposed council tax requirement for the Mayor for 2020-21	67.599
Deduct: Nil	
Add: Nil	
NM (Mayor’s adjusted council tax requirement for 2020-21)	67.599
Deduct: OM (notional Mayor’s council tax requirement for 2019-20)	67.601
Add: Nil	
Deduct: Nil	
OM (notional Mayor’s council tax requirement for 2019-20)	67.601
Amount NM is greater than OM council tax requirement	0.000
Percentage Increase	0.0%
Assembly Budget: adjusted previous component Council Tax Requirement	£m
Notional component Council Tax requirement for the Assembly for 2019-20	2.613
Add: Percentage change in NM compared with OM	0.000
Adjusted previous component Council Tax requirement	2.613

Legal Advice

1. Overview

This section of Part 3 to the Mayor’s Draft Budget sets out legal advice on the scope of the Assembly’s amendment powers.

Details about council tax referendums and the limit on the Assembly’s power to amend the Mayor’s council tax requirement for the Assembly can be found in sections 5 and 7 of this document, alongside the advice provided by the Executive Director of Resources.

2. Scope of Assembly’s amendment powers

Statutory definitions

Paragraph 1 of Schedule 6 of the GLA Act imposes a duty on the Mayor and the Assembly, in accordance with that Schedule, to prepare and approve for each financial year—

- (a) a budget for each of the constituent bodies as such (a “component budget”); and
- (b) a consolidated budget for the Authority (a “consolidated budget”).

“*Component budget*” is defined as statements of—

- (a) the amount of the component council tax requirement for each of the seven constituent bodies; and
- (b) the calculations under section 85(4) to (7) of the GLA Act which give rise to that amount for each.

“*Consolidated budget*” is defined as statements of—

- (a) the amount of the Authority’s consolidated council tax requirement;
- (b) the amount of the component council tax requirement for each constituent body; and
- (c) the calculations under section 85(4) to (8) of the GLA Act which give rise to each of the amounts mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b) above.

What is the Assembly’s power of amendment?

The Assembly’s power to amend the draft budget is limited to making changes to the figures required to be calculated under section 85 (4) to (8) of the GLA Act (“the statutory calculations”) in respect of each of the component bodies’ component budget and council tax requirements and the resulting consolidated budget and consolidated council tax requirement. This is because the GLA Act defines the component council tax requirement solely in terms of the statutory calculations.

In the event that any successful amendment to the final draft budget would give rise to an increase in council tax (adjusted and/ or unadjusted relevant basic amount of council tax) that is excessive under the approved excessiveness principles then the Assembly must also approve substitute budget calculations that do not give rise to an excessive increase in council tax (as defined). This area is covered in Section 5 above.

Assembly’s own component budget

As discussed above, the Assembly’s right of amendment in respect of its own budget is again limited. Any increase in the component council tax requirement for the Assembly cannot be more in percentage terms than any increase for the Mayor (which in any event is subject to the rules on excessiveness and council tax referendums – see section 5 above); where the Mayor’s component council tax requirement has reduced, the Assembly’s component council tax requirement is to be reduced by at least the same percentage (Schedule 6, paragraph 8A).

Amendments to the retained business rates allocation

The Assembly cannot amend the retained business rate allocation put forward by the Mayor in his final draft budget, although the Assembly could legally approve an amendment to that budget predicated on a different allocation figure, thereby changing the component and consolidated council tax requirement figures. Any business rates retention allocation figure approved by the Assembly as part of that process is not binding on the Mayor and only has the status of a proposal. This is because it does not fall within the definition of the final draft consolidated budget that the Assembly has the power to amend i.e. it falls below or underneath the level of the statutory calculations required by section 85 (4) to (8) that comprise the legal definition of the budget under the GLA Act 1999.

Amendment of underlying budget lines

In the same way the Assembly cannot amend budget lines that exist underneath or below the statutory calculations required by section 85 (4) to (8), i.e. it cannot amend the figures that give rise to those statutory calculations. The Assembly can only amend the statutory calculations themselves. This is because the budget is defined solely in terms of those calculations because they produce the council tax requirement.

Enforceability of successful budget amendments

Amendments to one or more of the statutory calculations in the Draft Budget passed by a simple majority will amend that budget. However, these amendments are not binding on the Mayor as the Final Draft Budget he presents may be different. If that is the case the Mayor must present a statement with the budget that shows and explains the changes.

Mayor’s failure to present final draft budget

Again, subject to the issue of excessiveness, if the Mayor, having presented a Draft Budget, fails to present a Final Draft Budget, the Assembly must meet and agree by a simple majority the component council tax requirement of each of the constituent bodies, and the consolidated budget is deemed to have been agreed accordingly (Schedule 6, paragraph 7). This should not apply as the Mayor is presenting his final draft consolidated budget to the Assembly on 24 February.

Assembly failure to approve final draft budget

Subject to the issue of excessiveness, the final draft budget approved by the Assembly (with or without amendment) is the GLA’s consolidated budget for the financial year (Schedule 6, paragraph 8(6)). If the Assembly fails to approve the budget before the last day of February, the final draft budget presented to the Assembly will be the GLA’s consolidated budget for the year (Schedule 6, paragraph 9).
