

Opportunities Plan

8. An Opportunities Plan, as summarised below, has therefore been developed which consists of a number of projects that have been identified to either reduce expenditure, increase income or safeguard the Council from future expenditure increases.

Summary of Opportunities Plan		
Project Grouping	Number of Projects	Potential Savings (£)
1. Service changes already in progress		356,600
2. Good Practice Projects	3	None expected
3. Projects achievable within current resources	6	336,000
4a. Projects needing resources to be led by Head of Service	7	510,000
4b. Projects needing resources to be led by Project Team	9	320,000
5. The 'B List' of projects to do as resources allow	18	Not costed
	43	1,522,600

9. Savings to budgets from the Plan that have already been made or that are considered achievable within current resources, totalling **£568,700** have already been built into the budget forecasts for 2018/19 to 2020/21.
10. However, it is recognised that the majority of the projects in the plan are not deliverable within current resources and budgets. This Strategy therefore recommends an 'Invest to Save' approach to achieving the rest of the Opportunities Plan, in which funds are allocated to establishing a small project team for a two-year fixed term to lead on or assist Heads of Service in the delivery of their projects. The cost of this, coupled with other costs such as commissioning external consultants, is estimated to be **£600,000** for the two years.

Council Tax Discounts

11. One opportunity highlighted in the Plan, is to make some minor changes to the Council Tax Discounts policy to bring the Council in line with other Councils in Hampshire. The proposed changes to take effect from 1 April 2019 are:
- decrease the period that 100% council tax discount is applied for Class C (formerly Class C exempt) properties (empty of people and furniture) from 6 months to 1 month. There are approximately 4,000 occasions each year when a Class C discount is awarded on vacant properties;
 - decrease the 100% council tax discount, currently applied for Class D (formerly Class A exempt) properties (empty of people and furniture and require or are undergoing major repairs or structural alterations, to render the property habitable, from 100% to 50% for 12 months. There are approximately 130 properties of this type each year in the borough;
 - increase the council tax charge for properties that have been empty (empty of people and furniture) in excess of 24 months from 150% to 200% (a 100% premium). There are approximately 50 properties of this type each year in the borough.
12. These changes are estimated to generate an increase in Fareham's share of the Council Tax of approximately £40,000. It would also help support the Council's aim in its Housing Strategy to maximise occupancy of empty properties in the Borough.

