

CABINET

19 October 2021

Title: Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/22 (Period 5, August 2021)	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Core Services	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: None	Key Decision: No
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Accountable Director: Philip Gregory, Finance Director	
Accountable Strategic Leadership Director: Claire Symonds, Managing Director	
Summary <p>This report sets out the Councils budget monitoring position for 2021/22 highlighting key risks and opportunities.</p> <p>The Council's General Fund budget for 2021/22 is £173.614m. At this early stage of the financial year there is still significant uncertainty in the forecast position due to continued financial risks arising from the Covid epidemic. The current forecast outturn position is £184.872m which would be an overspend of £11.258m or £10.737m once income is taken into account. This is a worsening of the position by around £1m compared to last month. This can be managed by use of the budget support reserve which was £11.433m at the end of the previous financial year; however, this will deplete the reserve increasing the risk in future years. The position will continue to be closely monitored and in-year remedial actions may need to be put in place if the overspend continues to increase.</p>	
Recommendation(s) <p>Cabinet is recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) Note the projected revenue outturn forecast for the 2021/22 financial year as set out in sections 2 and 3 and Appendix A of the report; and(ii) Note the update on savings proposals, as set out in section 4 of the report.	
Reason(s) <p>As a matter of good financial practice, the Cabinet should be informed about the Council's financial risks, spending performance and budgetary position. This will assist in holding officers to account and inform further financial decisions and support the objective of achieving Value for Money as part of the Well Run Organisation.</p>	

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 This is the second budget monitoring report to Cabinet for the 2021/22 financial year. The financial outturn for the previous financial year was a net underspend after transfers to and from reserves of £1.951m (subject to finalisation of the external audit). This was the net result of a large overspend of £26.13m offset by additional in-year grant income from the Government of £28.02m. The grant income was provided to meet the financial challenges to Local Government from the Covid pandemic and the lockdown/other measures taken to contain it. The overspend was driven by a range of factors including underlying demographic pressures, additional costs and demands arising from Covid and delays in making savings and income.
- 1.2 There has been a net £17.817m of growth added to the budget for 2021/22 as part of the Council's budget setting process in February in order to meet the then known pressures especially those in Care and Support. This was funded from Council Tax increases, commercial returns and government grants including special grants to meet additional Covid related costs in the first quarter of the year.
- 1.3 Despite the growth, this year has a high level of financial risk including the continuing impact of the Covid pandemic and its aftermath, the potential impacts of Brexit, the long-standing pressures that impact across the Local Government sector and the high levels of deprivation and disadvantage that already existed for residents of the borough.
- 1.4 As part of our ongoing improvement programme a more streamlined budget monitoring process has been introduced. This has resulted in some changes to the format of the budget monitoring report. This report is now a high-level summary with key information and action points with more detailed being contained within the appendices.

2. Overall Financial Position

- 2.1 The 2021/22 budget was approved by the Cabinet in February and is £173.613m – a net increase of £17.817m from last year. Growth funding was supplied for Care and Support (to meet demographic and cost pressures), Community Solutions (for Homelessness, Temporary Accommodation and the Creation of a Customer Experience Team), Inclusive Growth (Economic Development Team), Legal and Finance (Counter Fraud), Participation and Engagement and Council-wide (Staff Pay award and non-staff inflation). It also includes £8.201m of savings plans – most of which were brought forward from previous years.
- 2.2 As the table below shows the expenditure forecast is £184.873m. This is a prudent estimate and as it is still early in the year it is possible that this can be managed down. However, if the final outturn is in line with this forecast then this would result in an overspend of £10.738m. This level of overspend can be fully met from the budget support reserve without the need for recourse to the General Fund which will remain at £17m. However, this would reduce the Council's ability to absorb further financial risks or support new investment in transformation in future years.

- 2.3 A proportion of the additional pressures are driven by the Covid epidemic – however as time has passed some of the additional costs have now become the “new normal” and it is becoming increasingly hard to draw a sharp distinction between Covid costs and business as usual. Additional Government support has been provided for the first quarter of the year and this has already been built into the forecasts.

Table 1.	NET FULL			
	YEAR BUDGET	Full Year Forecast	Variance	Change
COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS	24,009	27,139	3,130	
CORPORATE MANAGEMENT	5,310	2,903	(2,408)	
INCLUSIVE GROWTH	1,292	1,967	676	
LAW AND GOVERNANCE	(1,321)	(1,267)	54	(85)
MY PLACE	16,529	19,111	2,583	254
PEOPLE AND RESILIENCE	124,179	129,332	5,153	857
STRATEGY & CULTURE	3,617	5,688	2,071	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	173,614	184,873	11,258	1,026
FUNDING	(173,614)	(174,134)	(520)	
TOTAL NET POSITION	173,614	184,873	11,259	1,026

3. Key Variances

- 3.1 This section provides a high-level summary of the main variances. There has been little change in most forecasts except where staffing costs have worsened in My Place and demand pressures continue to increase in Care and Support. More detail on all Council services is given in Appendix A.
- 3.2 **Community Solutions.** This service is facing a range of different financial risks and pressures including demand and cost pressures that may be partly covid driven in Homelessness, NRPF and the contact centre, additional costs from Digitalisation and the Innovate IT system and the loss of some external grant funding. In response a range of mitigation actions have already been put in place and the service continues to work on new grant bids to replace lost funding and long-term strategies to manage homelessness.
- 3.3 **Corporate Management.** There is a forecast underspend of £1.4m in central expenses from provisions and corporate contingencies. This effectively serves as a buffer against service overspends. It should be noted that this is a much lower figure than in previous years as more funding has been moved into service department budgets. There is also an underspend on the ELWA levy budget.
- 3.4 **Inclusive Growth** There is an overspend in this area from income shortfalls - £335k for historic grants no longer being received which needs to be corrected in the MTFS and £281k from the Film Unit where income generation is still being adversely affected by the impact of Covid.
- 3.5 **Law and Governance.** Following the introduction of new CPZs and increased activity as the lockdown has eased there has been an increase in Parking income. This can be volatile and will be monitored throughout the year. Currently it is assumed to be transferred to the Parking Account reserve.

- 3.6 **My Place.** There are long standing pressures in this service in both Homes and Assets and Public Realm including staffing and agency costs (which have been exacerbated by Covid and the self-isolation rules), transport costs and income from the HRA and commercial rents. The service is undertaking an in-depth review of its operating model to identify its true funding needs and where there is scope for cost reductions.
- 3.7 **People and Resilience.** There has been a very substantial increase in the Children's Care and Support caseload in the past year which is thought to be linked to Covid and lockdown. In addition, the number of children requiring residential care placements and the cost of that provision has also risen. Altogether there is an overspend of £2.1m in Children's Care and Support as a result of these two issues. In addition, there are similar pressures in Disabilities for Children with Disabilities. There is also a short-term increase in the Equipment and Adaptations budget as the service works through a backlog built up during the lockdown period when access to homes of vulnerable people was restricted for their protection.
- 3.8 **Strategy and Culture.** The main pressure in this area is the loss of the Leisure concession income and financial support to the provider directly linked to Covid. In addition, there are income shortfalls across heritage and leisure and historic pressures in the ICT budget.

4. Savings and Commercial Income

- 4.1 There is a savings target of £8.210m for 2021/22 – of which £2.641m are new savings approved in the MTFs, £5.033m are unachieved A2020 brought forward from the previous year(s) and £0.536m are Transformation programme savings in Care and Support. £4.799m of these savings depend on efficiencies and cost reductions and £3.411m are based on new or increased income.
- 4.2 To date only £0.381m of savings are assessed as securely delivered and a further £0.891m are considered low risk. This leaves £6.938m (85%) high or medium risk.
- 4.3 High risk savings include the Contact Centre restructure, savings on the Foyer lease arrangements and £2.2m relating to debt and income improvements.
- 4.4 The budget also includes a target of £12.4m returns from the Council's subsidiary companies. At present there is good confidence that this can be met through dividends paid by Be First for the financial years 2019/20 and 2020/21 (Dividends are paid in arrears following the audit of the accounts and may be delayed in times of uncertainty.) There is no dividend expected from BDTP.

5. Financial Implications

Implications completed by: Katherine Heffernan, Head of Service Finance

- 5.1 This report is one of a series of regular updates to Cabinet about the Council's financial position.

6. Legal Implications

Implications completed by Dr Paul Feild, Senior Standards and Governance Lawyer

- 6.1 Local authorities are required by law to set a balanced budget for each financial year. During the year, there is an ongoing responsibility to monitor spending and ensure the finances continue to be sound. This does mean as a legal requirement there must be frequent reviews of spending and obligation trends so that timely intervention can be made ensuring the annual budgeting targets are met.
- 6.2 Nevertheless, the unique situation of Covid 19 presents the prospect of the need to purchase additional supplies and services with heavy competition for the same resources together with logistic challenges which is causing scarcity and rising costs. Still, value for money and the legal duties to achieve best value still apply. There is also the issue of the Councils existing suppliers and service providers also facing issues of pressure on supply chains and staffing matters of availability. As a result, these pressures will inevitably create extra costs which will have to be paid to ensure statutory services and care standards for the vulnerable are maintained. We must continue careful tracking of these costs and the reasoning for procurement choices to facilitate grounds for seeking Covid 19 support funds.

7 Other Implications

- 7.1 **Risk Management** – Regular monitoring and reporting of the Council's budget position is a key management action to reduce the financial risks of the organisation.
- 7.2 **Corporate Policy and Equality Impact** – regular monitoring is part of the Council's Well Run Organisation strategy and is a key contributor to the achievement of Value for Money.

Public Background Papers used in preparation of this report

- The Council's MTFS and budget setting report was presented to Assembly on 3rd March 2021.
<https://modgov.lbbd.gov.uk/Internet/documents/s144013/Budget%20Framework%202021-22%20Report.pdf>

List of appendices:

- Appendix A: Revenue Budget Monitoring Pack