

CABINET
17th JANUARY 2022

Council's Revenue Budget Monitoring Report

Recommendations / key decisions required:

That the Cabinet receives the Budget Monitoring report and considers the budgetary position and appropriate corrective action.

In respect of significant overspends, Chief Officers and Heads of Service to critically review options available to them to limit the forecasted overspend of budgets, whilst recognising the ongoing impact which COVID19 measures have had on the Authority's overall budget.

Reasons:

To provide the Cabinet with an update on the latest budgetary position as at 31st October 2021, in respect of 2021/22. Whilst the scale of COVID19 response is reducing, this budget position recognises the ongoing financial pressures faced by the Authority as well as the additional funding support provided by Welsh Government.

Relevant scrutiny committee to be consulted: NA

Cabinet Decision Required YES

Council Decision Required NO

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER:

Cllr. David Jenkins

Directorate: Corporate
Services

Name of Director:
Chris Moore

Report Author:
Randal Hemingway

Designations:

Director of Corporate Services

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cabinet

17th January 2022

The revenue budget monitoring reports as at 31st October 2021 are attached and indicate that:

COUNCIL FUND REVENUE ACCOUNT (Appendix A)

Overall, the monitoring report forecasts an underspend for the year at departmental level of £1,726k. with a forecast underspend on the Authority's net revenue budget of £1,279k.

At a high level this is due to a combination of:

- additional COVID19 related costs and lost income being largely refunded under the Welsh Government hardship scheme
- some services still paused or impacted by lockdown measures and social distancing during Q1
- Utilisation of some capital financing underspends, due to some significant pressure points on in-year capital project budgets, which was approved as part of a separate report.

The full year forecast reflects the impact which includes known financial positions up to the point of writing. As such the forecast continues to remain sensitive to any future worsening of the pandemic, in particular if any reintroduction public restrictions being required. During the first half of the year (April-September), additional expenditure and income loss totalling approximately £13 million has been claimed under the Welsh Government hardship scheme.

Members should note the risk on Council Tax collection rates and increased applications under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, this will continue to be monitored closely, particularly as the furlough scheme has now ended.

Chief Executive's Department

The Chief Executive Department is anticipating an underspend of £548k for the year. This is made up of overspends due to a reduction in anticipated income from Commercial property, livestock markets and provision markets, offset by a net underspend on Industrial Premises, underspends on Member pay and travelling, staffing savings from vacant posts across the department, along with savings on utilities costs associated with our administrative buildings.

Operational budgets

The Chief Executive's section has an underspend of £181k, primarily due to vacant posts and an underspend on supplies and services.

There is a £74k net overspend in the People Management section. This consists of £32k in relation to a reduction in supplies and services costs, along with a £43k underspend due to fewer DBS checks being undertaken than budgeted for. These are offset by a £62k overspend in Employee Wellbeing, due to a shortfall in external SLA income and an unachieved training efficiency within Organisational Development of £29k. There is also a £58k overspend on various salary related costs along with other small overspends

The ICT & Corporate Policy section are reporting a £99k underspend largely due to part year vacant posts within the division, pending a team review which has now been completed.

Admin and Law are showing an underspend of £288k. Members pay and travelling are underspent by £102k, and there is an additional £27k of income for work undertaken on behalf of the HRA. There is also additional income from external work of £35k along with a £124k saving on staff vacancies and supplies and services.

The Marketing and Media section have a £201k anticipated net underspend, made up of an overspend of £178k within Marketing and Media on salary costs, pending a staffing review within the whole division (2019/20 saving proposal), and also a loss of income streams from external partners such as ERW. This is offset by an underspend on staffing costs in the Customer Services Centres, Translation Unit and Yr Hwb. These will all form part of the divisional staffing review.

Statutory Services are reporting an underspend of £121k. This is made up of a saving on vacant posts of £56k pending a divisional realignment, along with a £32k underspend on Registrars due to income generated above the budgeted figure. Coroners are anticipated to be underspent by £15k as a result of the appointment of medical examiners by the NHS, resulting in less cases being referred to the coroner. This underspend was partially offset by additional costs associated with a jury inquest during the year. There are also smaller underspends on supplies and services within County Elections and Registration of Electors.

The Regeneration division is expecting a £268k overspend for the year. This is made up of an overspend of £443k due to a loss of income on Livestock markets, provision markets, farms and Commercial Properties, largely due to an overall reduction in occupancy levels, along with a rent free period at Carmarthen Mart.

This is offset by savings in utilities costs due to staff working remotely of £76k, along with additional high levels of income due to continued high occupancy rates within industrial units, despite the pandemic of £67k. There is also an additional saving of £35k on staffing costs due to a vacant post along with other smaller savings.

Department for Communities

The Department for Communities is £169k overspent for the year. There are significant variances in social care services though these are largely offset by reduced costs where service provision is reduced due to COVID19 restrictions, or additional funding. Social care teams have prioritised the safe delivery of key services, meaning that the department has been unable to progress some of the planned savings proposals.

Older People's budgets have an underspend of £1,395k. There are significant underspends in both commissioned and local authority Residential Beds due to reduced associated costs as a result of fewer occupied beds, as well as reduced provision of day services due to COVID19 restrictions.

Physical Disabilities services are underspent by £123k. The budget variances across the range of services are due to alternative care provision in response to residential respite and community services restrictions.

In Learning Disability services, there is an overspend of £1,323k. Budgetary pressure remains on Residential and Group Homes / Supported Living as the savings target are difficult to deliver due to COVID19 restrictions. Also, an increased demand for Direct Payments and a lack of availability of alternative provision due to COVID restrictions has added further pressure. These pressures have been offset with savings due to the reduction of Day Services.

The overspend in Mental Health of £391k is due to increased demand with the main budget pressure in Residential Beds and Group Homes / Supported Living.

Support Services are underspent by £28k largely due to additional income as result of transport support provided to health services.

Leisure & Culture Services is forecasting a nil variance. There is still likely to be a material reduction in income across a number of Services due to the ongoing restrictions, however the Welsh Government have confirmed that the recovery of lost income can now be claimed until the 31st March 2022.

Council Funded Housing and Public Protection Services are forecasting a nil variance.

Corporate Services

The Corporate Services Department is anticipating an £892k underspend for the year.

Rent Allowances are anticipating an underspend of £294k, largely due to efficient recovery of overpayments. There is a £346k underspend on pre LGR pension costs along with a £133k underspend on Rates Relief due to low take up of the scheme.

There are also underspends on salaries due to vacancies across the department, and staff not yet at the top of their scale, along with a reduction in bank charges. There is also £35k of net additional income from services provided to external organisations.

These underspends are offset by an expected overspend of £572k on Council Tax Reduction Scheme due to increased demand. This is a demand led budget, for which WG funding has not increased for many years despite WG's increased expectations in terms of Council's tax

raising abilities. We received a contribution from WG in 2020/21 to cover this shortfall, but we are yet to receive confirmation whether the same will apply this year.

Department for Education and Children

The Department for Education and Children is currently forecasting to break even for the year.

A full review of budget allocation across the department is being undertaken to highlight both the immediate and longer-term pressures. Where appropriate, budgets are being realigned.

A number of services are facing increasing demand with in-year underspends in other service areas, mainly due to vacancies and additional grant funding, financially supporting these pressures – special education needs £697k, school meals £583k, commissioning & social work including legal costs £386k, fostering services £68k, direct payments £159k are the most significant.

Schools Delegated Budgets

Schools working budgets are forecasting to utilise £4.7m of their reserves in the current year. A significant proportion of this is committed for recovery and catch up as one-off additional expenditure, funded by grant received last year. Council officers are in the process of reviewing budget forecasts as some schools continue to experience difficulties in setting a balanced budget.

Environment

The Environment department is reporting a projected underspend of £455k for the financial year, largely due to increased income forecasted from internal recharges reflecting the work projected to the end of the financial year by the Property division.

The Waste and Environmental Services division is projecting a £39k underspend, mainly due to the £49k surplus on Green Waste collections due to increased customer base, a £37k underspend in Cleansing as a result of vacant posts which are to be filled imminently following review and savings within other areas including Public Conveniences and Grounds Maintenance. These savings are offset by an underachievement of income against budget on the Sustainable Drainage Approval service which has resulted in a £53k overspend.

Highways and Transportation are projecting a £203k overspend for the year. The main variance is the estimated £417k overspend on school transport due to additional operating days plus supply chain tender prices are increasing. There is a net loss of income of £116k in parking services due to the volume of ticket sales projected not matching budgeted levels, together with a £14k pressure on Nantyci Park & Ride due to a decrease in demand for the service. These pressures are offset by an estimated £161k underspend in Property Design/CHS Works as a result of increased income from internal recharges reflecting work projected during the year, a £55k salary saving due to a vacant post and a reduction in an employee's contracted working hours within the Road Safety team, £82k income projection within Traffic management and Transport Strategic Planning and £32k savings from vacant posts within other areas including school crossing patrols and Public Rights of Way. .

The Planning Division is showing a forecasted £198k underspend, largely due to vacant posts within the team during the year, which includes a vacant Head of Planning post and savings

on consultants' fees due to a covid-related delay in the LDP process. These savings are offset by an estimated shortfall in anticipated income.

The Property Division is reporting a £385k underspend, mainly due to increased income from Property Maintenance reflecting additional work anticipated during the year including significant unexpected projects.

The Business Support division is projecting a £35k underspend during the year.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (Appendix B)

The HRA is predicting to be underspent by £1,337k for 2021/22. Repairs and Maintenance is forecast to be underspent by £731k. Budget Managers are predicting underspends on Minor Works £1,471k due to capacity and procurement issues and an overspend on Voids/Responsive/Other +£740k mainly due to costs associated with catch up on repairs delayed by COVID19.

Supervision & Management and Support is projecting an underspend of £232k mainly due to staff vacancies £393k, transport costs £27k due to reduced visits, offset by additional legal costs £171k premises/supplies/other +£17k.

Capital financing charges will be £344k less than budgeted due to reduced borrowing in 2020/21 reducing the MRP requirement as result of 2020/21 end of year position and additional grants secured in 2021/22.

Income (inclusive of rents) will be under target by approximately +£19k. This is made up predominantly of less than budgeted rental/service charge income of +£32k and small variation in interest receivable +£15k. We will receive more grant than anticipated of £66k primarily from Welsh Government.

Lists of the main variances are attached to this report.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report:

Signed: Chris Moore

Director of Corporate Services

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities NONE	Legal NONE	Finance YES	ICT NONE	Risk Management Issues NONE	Staffing Implications NONE	Physical Assets NONE
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3. Finance

Council Fund

Overall, the Authority is forecasting an underspend of £1,279k at this point in time. The final out-turn position will be influenced by COVID19 related expenditure, income loss and respective claims from WG through the remainder of the financial year.

HRA

The HRA is predicting to be underspent by £1,337k for 2021/22.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below

Signed: Chris Moore

Director of Corporate Services

1. Scrutiny Committee – Not applicable

2. Local Member(s) – Not applicable

3. Community / Town Council – Not applicable

4. Relevant Partners – Not applicable

5. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations – Not applicable

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S) AWARE/CONSULTED
NO

Include any observations here

Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information

List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

THESE ARE DETAILED BELOW

Title of Document	File Ref No.	Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
2021/22 Budget		Corporate Services Department, County Hall, Carmarthen