

Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

25 July 2024

Responses to Recommendations / Information requested.

	Recommendations / Information Requested:	Response:	Accepted / Partially Accepted / Not Accepted:
Revenue Budget Outturn 2023-24			
Recommendations			
1	The Committee recommended that in addition to achieving substantial savings in revenue spending, consideration needed to be given to new controls on, and reprioritisation of, capital spending and whilst there might be value in introducing a moratorium on new capital projects, it was important not to lose opportunities for grant funding, the opportunity to invest in school projects, or funding necessary works.	<p>The capital programme is being reviewed to ensure funding is targeted at prioritised areas.</p> <p>Schemes currently within the programme are being reviewed to determine if the funding is still required, if the proposed scheme meets the original outcomes agreed and whether any can be reprioritised / withdrawn</p> <p>The Capital programme Board has met to look at the current pressures for funding across all services.</p> <p>The current position will be reported to Cabinet / Council in November 2024</p>	Accepted
2	The Committee recommended that given the sizeable deficit for Homelessness, consideration be given to a need for a different approach, including a counterintuitive injection of capital, to bring the budget back on track.	<p>In March 2024, Cabinet approved a proposal, authorising the acquisition of Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) style properties for the purpose of providing temporary accommodation. This work has been on going with two properties having been purchased and a 3rd purchase in progress. These have been funded through capital monies in the approved programme</p> <p>An update report was considered and approved by Cabinet in September 2024 detailing the work being done to reduce dependency on holiday accommodation to provide</p>	Accepted

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		accommodation and to request approval to continue to acquire properties	
3	Members expressed concern regarding whether the Five Point Action Plan was an adequate response to the current situation and recommended that an update on the actions for the five points to date be reported for scrutiny at a future meeting of COSC.	The 5 point action plan is an important part of the overall Council response to the budgetary challenges, and one that allows employees and services across the organisation to make a contribution towards reducing overall expenditure. We are happy to provide further information on the impact of the plan at a future COSC meeting, but it should be noted as stated at the last meeting, the 5 point action plan on its own was never intended to be the answer to all of the Council's financial issues, and the service examples provided, of stepping down agency, changing the way in which we support homeless people etc, are likely to have an overall bigger financial impact.	Accepted
Additional Information			
4	Members discussed that the budgetary situation required a careful evaluation of the reserves available to the Council and that whilst the Council had been prudent in building up reserves in the past, they are a finite resource in the current circumstances, and it was imperative to minimise the extent to which the	The position has been updated and will be circulated to all members.	Accepted

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	<p>Council is dependent on reserves to achieve a balanced budget this year.</p> <p>The Committee requested a breakdown of the current situation with the reserves from the Chief Officer - Finance, Housing and Change.</p>		
5	<p>Members discussed that it was becoming more and more difficult to separate the revenue and capital budgets because there are pressures in both and a decision in one impacts the other.</p> <p>The Committee requested details of the current situation with capital projects from the Chief Officer - Finance, Housing and Change, including those that are contractually committed and therefore not available to be reprioritised.</p>	<p>Please see response above.</p> <p>Any proposed changes to the Capital programme will be reported to Cabinet / Council for approval</p>	Accepted

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Budget Monitoring 2024-25 - Quarter 1 Revenue Forecast			
Recommendations			
6	Given the budget outturn for 2023-24 and the emerging revenue forecast for 2024-25 the Committee recommended that there needed to be an urgent evaluation of the robustness of the current budget-setting process.	<p>The following has been introduced as part of the budget setting process for 2025/26 to ensure members are fully briefed on the drafting of the budget and to enable them to be involved throughout the process. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All member briefing sessions introduced at key times in the year to ensure all members are aware of the financial position at • Private meetings have taken place with all political groups to discuss the key issues and priorities for them • BREP has been reviewed with more research to be done with members to improve understanding and to introduce more rigorous challenge into the budget setting process • The Revenue Monitoring Board has met to look at the position at the end Q1 and to discuss remedial actions with Directors. A further meeting is to be organised to consider the Q2 position 	Accepted
7	Given the imperative to avoid having to issue a Section 114 notice in the future, the Committee recommended that consideration be given to the appointment of 'internal	The Revenue Monitoring Board has met to look at the Q1 position. The meeting did challenge Directors on the current position and the remedial action that can be taken.	Accepted

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	commissioners' to manage budgets in particular directorates.		
8	<p>The budget deficits in schools - 75% are in deficit and the total amount is just over £5 million – are a corporate risk for the Council. As school governors are volunteers, and given their substantial responsibilities, there needed an enhancement of the support offered to them. As such, Members recommended the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> There was an urgent need to explore the required skill set and training needs of school governors. Whether ways could be found to enhance the support provided to school governors by utilising individuals who have had professional leadership roles in schools and therefore understand what can and cannot be done. That consideration should be given to extending an invitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There has already been a skills audit conducted with governors (around 200 responses were received) and the outcomes at a local authority level have been sent to schools. Professional learning has been provided to governors (who attended the meeting) by a local authority finance manager. Schools are allocated a finance officer to support the headteachers and governors in decision-making. We are happy to explore opportunities to enhance the support offered to governors, where required and where available. We would be happy to share the invitation with all school governors. As noted above, there has already been a presentation to governors about the challenging budget position. This can be repeated if required. 	Accepted

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	<p>to school governors to observe and on occasion contribute to meetings of SOSC 1.</p> <p>d. That the Corporate Director - Education, Early Years & Young People should provide a briefing to school governors (like that provided to head teachers) to help them understand the wider context of their role in a difficult budgetary situation.</p>		
9	<p>Given the corporate risk associated with the budgetary situation in schools, the Committee recommended that there was an urgent need to consider the status of this issue as part of the Risk Register and whether the Regional Internal Audit Service (RIAS) should be requested to investigate it.</p>	<p>The financial position for schools was included as a new risk in the last iteration of the Corporate Risk Assessment. The assessment is being updated now and this point will be taken into account as part of that update.</p>	Accepted
10	<p>Given the Council will receive at most a cash flat settlement (representing a 3% reduction in the revenue budget) from the Welsh Government this year, Members recommended that the</p>	<p>Scrutiny/ Chair actioning.</p>	Accepted

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	Chair write to the Welsh Government to express their concerns about this and to request more information on their future approach to local government finance.		
Additional Information			
11	The Committee requested that case studies of the value of early intervention in adult and children's care be circulated to members of the Committee.	Case studies attached	Accepted
12	The Committee requested an all-member briefing on Part 9 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 that requires local authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation with their relevant partners and others, in relation to adults with needs for care and support, carers and children.	All Member briefing has been arranged for January 2025	Accepted

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Quarter 4 Year-End Performance 2023-24			
Recommendations			
13	The Committee recommended that in light of the serious budget situation, there was a need to consider as a matter of urgency the appropriate balance between achieving sustainable cost savings and performance.	The Corporate Plan Delivery Plan for 2024-25 has been reviewed in line with the MTFP and targets have been adjusted where necessary and have been agreed by Cabinet and Council The performance reporting process is to be refined to highlight where performance may have been impacted by budget changes agreed in the MTFP	Accepted
14	The Committee expressed that staff sickness, issues with recruitment and early retirement remained a risk for the Council, especially where lean staffing and sickness absence combine, and recommended that consideration be given to the combined impact of these in order to avoid leading to potentially serious service shortcomings.	The data is analysed and considered by management teams and CMB at regular intervals. Workforce planning and succession planning is considered and HR support any structural changes needed.	Partially – consideration is already given and mitigated where possible.

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15	The Committee recommended that there was a need to produce a positive narrative about performance where there is good news.	The performance team will focus on this more strongly in 2024/25. As part of the budget setting process priorities for the Council going forward, in the increasingly difficult financial context, is being undertaken	Accepted
16	The Committee recommended that there was an urgent need for the Cabinet and Senior Officers to carry out a deliberate, ruthless and strategic exercise to identify the most important priorities – while eliminating or postponing less important ones.	Performance indicators were reviewed for 2024/25 and presented to members, including COSC, as a draft CPDP in Spring 2024, with targets being presented in September 2024. It is proposed that COSC's consideration of the draft CPDP in 2025 is more detailed / given more time or priority.	Accepted
17	The Committee recommended that the number of well-being objectives, and the associated performance indicators, needed to be revised and that there was a need for a very limited list of priorities to guide decision-making.	The CPDP for 2025/26 will be developed during Autumn 2024 and it is expected to be significantly scaled back from its current size and scale, but this will require clear and ruthless prioritisation from Cabinet and focus, discipline and understanding from Scrutiny members as it will inherently mean that many PIs and commitments are deprioritised and taken out of regular monitoring at this level.	Accepted

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Self-Assessment 2023/24			
Recommendations			
18	Given that there were a number of performance indicators within the first well-being objective, Protecting our Most Vulnerable, for which performance is unsatisfactory or not very good, the Committee recommended that they needed to be addressed as a key priority.	SSWB is focussed within available resources on priorities actions to protect the vulnerable. The actions being taken are set out in detail in the 3 year strategic plans for children and families and adults with care and support needs.	Accepted
19	The Committee recommended that given some of the PIs – in respect of homelessness, for example - came from the Welsh Government and were no longer fit for purpose due to legislative changes, that it would be appropriate for officers to approach the Welsh Government to consider if they could be revised, and the outcome should be shared with Members at a future meeting.	The homelessness PIs have been retained for 2024/25 – we have considered the need for change and balanced it with the need for trend information over time, comparison information with other authorities, and information to demonstrate (and influence on) the impact of Welsh Government policies.	Accepted

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20	The Committee recommended that Cabinet Members be invited to the next meeting of the Committee on 9 September 2024, to provide an overview of their strategic approach and priorities for the coming year.	Actioned. Cabinet members attended COSC on 9 September 2024.	Accepted.