

**SUBJECT: REVENUE & CAPITAL MONITORING 2021/22
FORECAST OUTTURN STATEMENT – MONTH 6**

MEETING: CABINET

DATE: 1st December 2021

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To provide Members with an updated forecast of the revenue and capital outturn position for the current financial year.
- 1.2 This report will also be considered by Select Committees as part of their responsibility to,
- assess whether effective budget monitoring is taking place,
 - monitor the extent to which budgets are spent in accordance with agreed budget and policy framework,
 - challenge the reasonableness of projected over or underspends, and
 - monitor the achievement of predicted efficiency gains or progress in relation to savings proposals.
- 1.3 To provide an update on the financial impact of Covid-19 on the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Cabinet recognises the improvement in the forecast deficit at month 6 of £1.94m with the Council's core service delivery, a £1.438m reduction in the forecast from month 2 when taking into account the expected non-teaching pay award.
- 2.2 That Cabinet request that the Senior Leadership team manage the forecast deficit on core service delivery of £1.94m, both through continuing budget recovery action and the expectation of further specific grant funding from Welsh Government before the year-end, recognising the long history that the Council has of working within budget.
- 2.3 That Cabinet recognises the importance consequence of a balanced budget position being achieved for 2021/22, in that it safeguards the need to draw on limited one-off reserve headroom retained to assist with meeting the financial challenges over the medium term and where uncertainty remains on the extent of Welsh Government funding.
- 2.4 That Cabinet recognises an overall net revenue forecast deficit at month 6 of £5.91m, which takes account of a further forecast deficit of £3.97m that is directly associated with the extraordinary financial pressures attached to Covid-19.
- 2.5 That Cabinet can be reasonably assured based on commitments from Welsh Government, that all Covid-19 associated cost pressures and income losses that are eligible to be met

by the Welsh Government Covid-19 Hardship fund will be funded to the end of March 2022.

- 2.6 That Cabinet note that there remains significant Covid-19 related cost pressures and income losses forecast after the end of March 2022 which presently have no funding commitment from Welsh Government. The Council will need to carefully assess the risk of these pressures during the ongoing budget strategy for 2022/23 and the mitigating measures available in the event that no further funding comes forward.
- 2.7 Whilst the Council is grateful for the funding commitments made to date by Welsh Government through the Covid-19 Hardship fund to the end of March 2022, Cabinet will continue to make strong representations to Welsh Government for further clarity on funding for the ongoing pressures post March 2022. This is both in the form of continuing to respond to the direct impact of the pandemic but just as importantly, the wider and longer lasting indirect impact of the pandemic on Council services, particularly where this is now becoming evident in the areas of Homelessness, Children's services, Adult social care and Children's additional learning needs.
- 2.8 That Cabinet recognise the ongoing risk of the awaited outcome of pay negotiations for non-teaching staff and that in the event that any pay award is agreed above the current forecast of 1.75%, that this will present a further budgetary pressure. Welsh Government have been clear that no compensating funding is anticipated and given that the Minister confirmed via the final settlement that this already took into account any subsequent pay awards.
- 2.9 That Members note that the overall revenue outturn position continues to be subsidised by £2.2m of capital receipts which are being used to fund identified eligible expenditure under the flexible use of capital receipts directive. Reliance on this mitigation is not a sustainable measure in the longer term and its core purpose is to generate ongoing revenue savings and/or transform service delivery in a way that reduces costs or demand for services in future years for the Authority.
- 2.10 That Members note the forecast 93% delivery of the budgeted mandated savings as detailed in **appendix 3** and as agreed by full Council previously and the implicit remedial action/savings included in the financial outturn to compensate for circa 7% savings (£324k) reported as delayed or unachievable by service managers.
- 2.11 Cabinet notes the extent of forecast movements in Schools reserve usage contained in **table 4** and **appendix 1** which is informed and driven by the school investment plans that were supported by the significant and unprecedented late grant support provided by Welsh Government to schools at the end of 2020/21.
- 2.12 Cabinet considers the forecast capital outturn spend of £27.6m as outlined in **appendix 1** that would result in forecast slippage of £51.7m, noting the continuing delays in progressing some of the key capital projects due to the ongoing challenging operating conditions and impact both internally and externally in relation to Covid-19.

2.13 That Cabinet approve the Capital budget revisions as listed in **appendix 4** to this report resulting from the notification of external capital grant awards to the value of £3.0m and draw on Section 106 balances of £293k.

3. KEY ISSUES:

3.1 Assessing the financial impact of the pandemic on the Council

3.2 The 2021/22 budget was set against the backdrop of an unprecedented period of uncertainty, both in Local Government and in the wider context. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have a major impact on all local authorities and wider public services across Wales. From a financial perspective, the response to the pandemic has required the Council to incur significant additional expenditure, for example, costs relating to infection control measures, safeguarding the public and employees and support for elderly and vulnerable residents. In addition, income losses have also been substantial, during the period where services either have been closed or have experienced significant reductions in demand or footfall due to restrictions in place.

3.3 The Council has been given clear commitments of the proposed Welsh Government support to meet the Covid-19 pressures and significantly the announcement of further funding for local authorities via the Local Government Covid-19 hardship fund to the end of March 2022. Cabinet can be reasonably assured that all such Covid-19 related pressures will be funded during this period.

3.4 **Table 1** below indicates a total forecast net over spend for the Council at year end of £5.91m and how this variance is broken down into that relating to core service delivery and that relating directly to the response to the pandemic.

Table 1: Council Fund 2021/22 Outturn Forecast as at Month 6

Directorate	Total forecast variance at Month 6	Of which due to core service delivery:	Of which due to Covid-19 Expenditure Increase:	Of which due to Covid-19 Income Loss:
Social Care, Health & Safeguarding	1,181	1,181	0	0
Children & Young People	1,262	1,262	0	0
Enterprise	913	(520)	836	597
Monlife	1,228	21	0	1,207
Chief Executives Unit	(41)	(45)	4	0
People & Governance	(184)	(184)	0	0
Resources	1,504	363	708	433
Corporate Costs & Levies	705	705	0	0
Appropriations	(93)	(93)	0	0
Financing	(564)	(750)	186	0
Total forecast Month 6	5,911	1,940	1,734	2,237

Total forecast Month 2	9,020	2,538	2,246	4,236
Variance from Month 2	(3,109)	(598)	(512)	(1,999)

- 3.5 The forecast comprises expected additional costs of £1.734m and income losses of £2.237m directly related to the impact of Covid-19 on the Council, alongside a forecast 1.94m forecast over spend on core Council service delivery.
- 3.6 It is important to note that the combined forecast overspend of £3.971m relating specifically to the Covid-19 impact is presented on a prudent basis in so much that it displays a worst case scenario that does not take into account any of the further Welsh Government Hardship funding anticipated to meet the additional costs or reimbursement of income losses that have equally resulted.
- 3.7 The Council can be reasonably assured based on continued dialogue with Welsh Government and their current funding commitments, that all Covid-19 associated cost pressures and income losses eligible to be met by the Welsh Government Covid-19 Hardship fund will be funded to the end of March 2022.
- 3.8 Whilst the Council is grateful for the funding commitments made to date by Welsh Government through the Covid-19 Hardship fund, it is imperative that the Council will look to make strong representations for further clarity on funding arrangements for the ongoing Covid-19 pressures post March 2022. As Covid-19 restrictions continue to ease some of these pressures are expected to fall away quickly, others will take some time to unwind and stabilise, whilst others will be of a more permanent nature brought about by strategic policy change enacted by Welsh Government.
- 3.9 The Council prudently set aside reserve funding at the end of 2019/20 and 2020/21 totalling £2.6m for specific Covid-19 related pressures which were yet to materialise, and in the event that funding commitments from Welsh Government fall short of meeting the additional expenditure and income losses, this reserve funding will be available to mitigate the impact. Given the Council's comparatively low level of reserve cover, and the financial challenges over the medium term and beyond, recourse to this funding should be seen as an absolute last resort after exhausting all other alternative options. Therefore, it remains of critical importance that services manage budgets and expenditure tightly and take all opportunities to maximise income generation and bear down on cost. It is vitally important that services do not become reliant upon WG support and develop strategies that allow them to emerge from the pandemic on a sustainable financial footing.
- 3.10 Just as importantly as managing the direct impacts of the pandemic on the Council, the wider and longer lasting indirect impact on Council services need to be considered, particularly in the areas of Homelessness, Children's services, Adult social care and Children's additional learning needs. There remains significant latent and complex demands in these areas as a result of the ongoing societal impacts of the Covid-19 response and restrictions, and some of these impacts will take a significant period of time to unwind and the Council needs to engage in careful discussions with Welsh Government around the management of this in the medium term. Alongside this Council services need to prepare to be adaptable and innovative in their response to these pressures

materialising and not simply rely on traditional methods of mitigation or solely place reliance on further funding coming forward.

3.11 Financial assessment of core service delivery

3.12 As the Council continues to transition from the response phase of the pandemic it is important that Cabinet is kept informed as impacts are being assessed. The Council had already faced significant financial challenges in setting a balanced budget for 2021/22 and the pandemic has only accentuated the challenge. The budget round saw £10.3m of budget pressures accommodated, notably:

- In full, all pay and pension-related spending pressures in our schooling system;
- The increasing demand placed on children's social care services, adult social care and our children with additional learning needs budgets;
- Significant service pressures within the passenger transport unit and within recycling and waste and that look to ensure that the Council supports and sustains key service delivery;
- Investment that ensures that homeless people are provided adequate support, advice and accommodation in their time of need;
- An ongoing commitment to recognise and value the contribution made by the workforce and ensuring that local government staff are paid no less than the minimum wage set by the Living Wage Foundation. And that as a result of the Cabinet decision in January 2021 is also extended to apprenticeship roles within the Council.

3.13 Despite accommodating the above pressures into the 2021/22 budget, at month 6 there continues to be significant in year core service pressures forecast of £1.94m, with many of these pressures developing in the same key areas that have been provided additional support in the budget. The principal pressures are within the areas of:

- **Children's services 695k (£1,127k forecast at month 2)** – Despite stabilisation in Children looked after numbers, new children have required high cost residential placements, as opposed to those leaving which have been more in the lower cost fostering/kinship/family placements. A recent legal case has also led to the need to pay kinship carers in line with foster carer rates, along with the increase in payment to foster carers due to increasing skills training. This service area has benefited from one-off integrated care fund (ICF) funding totalling £300k, and £440k from the Social Care Recovery and Extension Fund which has mitigated the overspend.
- **Adults Services £547k (£536k at month 2)** – largely as a result of additional carer recruitment to our in house care at home service, and increased care packages in the South of the County.
- **Additional Learning Needs £982k (£830k at month 2)** – primarily due to a reduction in income from other LAs (£244k), additional support for pupils attending our own schools (£278k), and placement costs outside of our own schools (£460k).

- **Landlord services £401k (£193k at month 2)** – reduced income from recharges into capital schemes due to a lower level of activity in the capital programme, alongside an in-year adjustment to correct a control account in-balance due to the mis-posting of income in previous years.
- **Transport & Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) £236k (£470k at month 2)** - The cost of maintaining the authority's fleet has exceeded available budget. The improvement since month 2 is largely due to refinement of PTU commissioning costs which have reduced substantially since the previous forecast.
- **Non-teaching pay award £837k (£0 at month 2)** – An allowance has been made within the forecast at month 6 for the expected result of pay award negotiations over and above the 1% already budgeted for. The current pressure is based on an expected award of 1.75% with negotiations continuing between local government employer's representatives and trade unions.

These pressures are in part mitigated by:

- Out-performance of budgeted Council tax collection of £750k
- A reduction in net borrowing costs of £230k given the continuing low interest rate environment
- A forecast reduction in insurance costs of £140k based on settlement trends during the year
- Significant staff vacancies being carried in the establishment of £540k

- 3.14 Importantly the overall outturn position also continues to be supported by £2.2m of identified eligible expenditure to be funded from capital receipts under the flexible use of capital receipts directive. Reliance on these mitigations is a short term measure only and is clearly not sustainable over the medium term.
- 3.15 As the financial year progresses there will inevitably be further forecast budget savings identified and added to the budget forecast to mitigate those pressures outlined above. **Appendix 2** provides an analysis of both the significant forecast pressures and savings already identified at month 6.
- 3.16 It is important to note that the majority of the savings identified during the year to assist the in-year budget recovery are one-off savings and will not bring any further benefit to future year's budgets. Conversely, the majority of those pressures highlighted above are recurrent pressures and are being considered as part of the wider budget process for 2022/23 and beyond.
- 3.17 Following the further funding commitments received from WG for Covid-19 related pressures, as we look to the remainder of the financial year the key financial focus and uncertainty continues to be in arresting the core service delivery deficit of £1.94m. To that end the ongoing budget recovery plan will be vital in ensuring that the Council ends the year in a balanced position and without needing to deplete reserve balances which are at comparatively low levels despite the recent replenishment, and particularly in light of the challenging budgetary position it finds itself in leading into 2022/23.

3.18 Progress against mandated savings

3.19 The 2021/22 budget included mandated savings totalling £4.734m and the progress against these is summarised in **table 3** below and in more detail in **appendix 3**.

Table 3: Progress against mandated savings

Directorate	2021/22 Budgeted Savings	Saving achieved	Delayed Savings	Savings Unachievable	% Achieved
	£0	£0	£0	£0	
Children & Young People	(1,510)	(1,266)	(244)	0	84%
Social Care & Health	(874)	(874)	0	0	100%
Enterprise	(821)	(821)	0	0	100%
Monlife	(100)	(80)	0	(20)	80%
Resources	(165)	(117)	(48)	0	71%
Chief Executives Unit	(32)	(20)	(12)	0	63%
Corporate Costs & Levies	(1,508)	(1,508)	0	0	100%
Appropriations	275	275	0	0	100%
Total	(4,734)	(4,411)	(304)	(20)	93%

3.20 It is pleasing to note the forecast 93% delivery of mandated savings, especially in light of the ongoing challenges faced by services in the current operating conditions. Finance officers will continue to work with services to ensure that these savings are fully delivered as the year progresses and to look at options for delivering on savings indicated as delayed.

3.21 School balances

3.22 From a financial perspective, 2020/21 was an unprecedented year for schools who received several significant Welsh Government grants to support them and their pupils during a period of significant disruption to learning, and alongside this sustained periods of enforced closure during the financial year resulted in spending on core budgets being significantly curtailed. This resulted in the majority of schools bringing forward significant surplus balances into the 2021/22 financial year.

3.23 The Authority required schools carrying significant surplus balances that were above levels guided by Welsh Government (£50k for a Primary, £100k for a Secondary) to provide investment plans setting out how they intended to spend the significant balances being held. These plans have subsequently been completed and assessed and has informed the budget monitoring process, with schools forecasting to draw on £1.558m of balances during the year, as shown in **table 4** below.

Table 4: Forecast movement school balances for 2021/22

Draft Council Fund Outturn 2021/22 – School Balances Summary outturn position at Month 6	(A) Opening Reserves (Surplus) / Deficit Position 2021/22 £000's	(B) Draw / (Contribution) from / (to) School Balances @ Month 2 £000's	(C) Draw / (Contribution) from / (to) School Balances @ Month 6 £000's	(A+C) Forecast Reserve Balances at 2021/22 Outturn £000's	Variance Draw on School Balances Month 2 to Month 6 £000's
Cluster					
Abergavenny	(1,158)	309	426	(732)	117
Caldicot	(1,091)	539	372	(719)	(167)
Chepstow	(349)	516	417	68	(99)
Monmouth	(794)	457	354	(440)	(103)
Special	(26)	(39)	(11)	(37)	28
Total	(3,418)	1,782	1,558	(1,860)	(224)

- 3.24 Irrespective of the significant one-off funding given to schools at the end of 2020/21, it is clear that the inherent structural budget deficits that have led to a significant number of schools being in deficit over the past few years remain and these will require resolution regardless. It is expected that the additional funding made available to those schools will allow a period of transition and as to allow those underlying budgetary issues to be rectified without impacting on educational standards.
- 3.25 **Capital outturn forecast**
- 3.26 The capital expenditure forecast outturn detailed in **appendix 1** indicates no variance to budget at the present time. This is not uncommon on capital projects at this stage of the year where projects are in progress and final consolidation of costs will not be undertaken until later in the year.
- 3.27 The impact of Covid-19 on the programme has varied and is very much been dependent on the nature of the works being undertaken. Following initial delays on schemes during periods of operating restrictions, contractors are adapting to Covid-19 work restrictions, although cost inflation and supply chain issues continue to represent a challenge to project delivery. Some of the issues will be temporary, however it remains unclear whether increases in cost inflation will be sustained over the medium term.
- 3.28 There is therefore a significant level of slippage forecast at month 6 of £51.77m (65% of total budget) where some of the Councils major schemes have been impacted by delays:

- **Abergavenny 3-19 School (£26.399m)** where the original budget schedule for the project has changed considerably since the inception of the project.
- **Asset Investment Fund (£18.067m)** where further expenditure is dependent on appropriate schemes coming forward that meet the Authorities investment criteria.
- **Crick Road Care Home (£5.964m)** where there have been delays in the building schedule.
- **Other notable slippages:** £813k for a backlog in disabled facility grant implementations and £516k for modifications to County Hall 'J' block, delayed due to a 'SUDS' consent being required.

3.29 The forecast movement in capital receipts balances for the year is shown below. Whilst overall balances on the face of it are healthy, there remains the risk that forecast receipts receivable for 2022/23 onwards are at comparatively low levels, and combined with the fact that receipts are continuing to be used to subsidise the revenue budget through capitalisation direction means that the scope for further capital investment funded via receipts will be limited.

Table 5: Forecast movement in capital receipt balances

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Balance as at 1st April	9,581	13,872	12,523	11,436	10,349
Capital receipts used for financing	(3,737)	(1,895)	(684)	(684)	(684)
Capital receipts used to support capitalisation direction	(2,208)	(2,208)	(507)	(507)	(507)
Capital receipts Received or Forecast	10,236	2,754	104	104	104
Forecast Balance as at 31st March	13,872	12,523	11,436	10,349	9,262

4 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 4.1 This report provides an update on the current financial situation and the challenges facing the Council now and over the medium term. It has been prepared at a time of great uncertainty as the Council still transitions from the emergency response phase of the Covid-19 pandemic towards a period of recovery.
- 4.1 The outturn forecast that has been prepared for consideration is predicated on assumptions that have been independently assessed by budget holders and subsequently reviewed as part of the budget monitoring process. These assumptions don't look to represent a policy position that Cabinet is looking to take on when services are re-opening, either fully or in a more limited capacity, or how services are looking to respond to the changing demands. Rather they represent a reasoned assessment of the impact on services in year based on known information, anticipated future changes and estimates.
- 4.2 By far the greatest uncertainty that exists is the continued level of Welsh Government funding to be received to offset additional costs incurred in responding to the Covid-19 emergency response and the significant income losses that have resulted where services

have ceased as a result of the lockdown restrictions in place. Current funding commitments from Welsh Government are due end in March 2022 in their current form and the council will continue to make strong representations for further clarity on funding for the ongoing Covid-19 pressures faced.

5 EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 5.1 This forecast outturn report represents an assessment of the forecast for the 2021/22 financial year based on six months of data. More so than ever the combination of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on service operating conditions and the fact that it is only part way through the financial year, means that a level of risk uncertainty should be attributed to the forecast.
- 5.2 There is an increased level of comfort that Welsh Government funding will meet additional costs and income losses brought about by the response to and the impact of the pandemic to the end of the financial year. However, this continues to represent a risk that will only be mitigated by monthly and quarterly submissions to Welsh Government being agreed. And furthermore and beyond those impacts resulting from Covid-19 there exists a number of significant cost pressures that need to be managed regardless.
- 5.3 The Council has traditionally maintained formal reporting to Cabinet at month 2, month 5, month 9 and outturn, with more frequent budget monitoring information being undertaken at a departmental level and reported to management and the Strategic Leadership Team. More regular formal reporting to Cabinet is considered necessary only where circumstances necessitate it.
- 5.4 Given the further funding commitments made by Welsh Government through to the end of the year to cover Covid-19 pressures, it is considered appropriate to maintain the traditional reporting frequency for the remainder of this financial year, with further reporting to take place at months 9 and outturn.
- 5.5 The update of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the development of the budget proposals for 2022/23 and the medium term are underway. The Council will need to consider the wider and longer lasting indirect Covid-19 impact on Council services, particularly in the areas of Homelessness, Children's services, Adult social care and Children's additional learning needs. There remains significant latent and complex demands in these areas as a result of the ongoing societal impacts of the Covid-19 response and restrictions, and some of these impacts will take a significant period of time to unwind and the Council therefore needs to engage in careful discussions with Welsh Government around the management of this in the medium term.

6 REASONS:

- 6.1 To ensure that the gravity of the financial challenges facing the Council are understood and that reasonable actions are being taken to safeguard the ongoing financial sustainability of the Council.
- 6.2 To provide a timely update on the current financial circumstances and challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and that will in turn lead to the Council needing to plan and plot a revised course to ensure it remains financially sustainable into the future.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 7.1 The resource implications of the current in-year forecast outturn are contained in this report and the attached appendices. At its worst the forecast outturn exhibits an over spend of £5.91m. However Welsh Government Covid-19 hardship funding is expected to cover a significant amount of this through to the end of the financial year.
- 7.2 The financial challenges facing the Council and resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic are significant in the current year and will undoubtedly be a feature of the next 4 years of the MTFP. Not just for this Council but all councils across Wales and the UK. The Council is having to incur significant costs in its response effort and this will continue as it transitions towards recovery. Furthermore and resulting from the restrictions that UK Government and Welsh Government have had to put in place to contain the spread of the virus we are suffering significant shortfalls in our income levels. Some of these will return more quickly than others as services are able to be safely turned back on.
- 7.3 In terms of how the Council will respond to the challenges faced in the current year and over the medium term this will very much depend on the level of compensating funding received from Welsh Government and the flexibilities afforded to Welsh local authorities to spread the impact over more than one financial year.
- 7.4 The Council is working on the basis that it will be fully funded by Welsh Government. However, there is clearly a risk that this will not happen and beyond this there are significant non Covid-19 pressures being managed.
- 4.2 The more immediate focus will be in arresting the core service delivery deficit of £1.94m. To that end the ongoing budget recovery plan will be vital in ensuring that the Council ends the year in a balanced position and without needing to deplete reserve balances which are at comparatively low levels despite the recent replenishment, and particularly in light of the challenging budgetary position it finds itself in leading into 2022/23.
- 7.5 There are resultant consequences for the MTFP and the budget process for 2022/23 and these will be developed in parallel and feed into the normal budget cycle and process.

8 EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 8.1 This report provides Members with information on the forecast revenue and capital outturn position of the Authority and carries no decisions. There are therefore no equality of future generations' implications directly arising from this report.
- 8.2 Any such impacts will be fully considered subsequently when Council receives details the budget recovery plan and revised budget proposals.

9 CONSULTEES:

Senior Leadership Team
Cabinet

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix 1 – Detailed outturn statements and directorate commentaries

Appendix 2 – Service variance analysis

Appendix 3 – Progress against budgeted savings

Appendix 4 – Capital external financing budget revisions

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