

Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee 20th February 2024

4. Month 9 Budget Monitoring – To scrutinise the budgetary position (revenue and capital) for services falling within the committee's remit at Month 9.

Cabinet Member Ben Callard introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Frances O'Brien, Tyrone Stokes, Peter Davies, Jane Rodgers, Peter Davies, Jonathan Davies and Dave Loder:

Key Questions from Members:

- How do you propose that we ensure schools are able to provide a good education to children, with 16 of them now in deficit?
- What are your views on the additional responsibilities being transferred by Welsh Government e.g. free school meals – what can be done about those? Is there anything else that is pertinent that we can be informed about?
- As we are looking retrospectively and can see the areas where is an overspend, what are the proposed recovery measures? Can residents be reassured that they will be dealt with?
- We have heard about the conditions that need to be met every year by the council, but in terms of £3.6m forecast to be over budget, what's different this year?
- Could residents reasonably ask about the strength of our forecasting given that £3.1m overspend was predicted at Month 6 and that has increased to £3.6m at Month 9?
- The £180k deficit for Borough Theatre is surprising – what are the reasons for that? Is there anything that we can do as Councillors to help with promotion etc.?
- It is good to see a surplus for Newport Leisure Park but there was a £47k shortage – is that being addressed? And Castle Gate, at £96k?
- What is the explanation for the cost of ALN transport from Carmarthenshire?
- The report shows an increase in income for Monmouth Leisure Centre which is very encouraging, but the budget proposal is to reduce hours there – is that counterproductive, just as we are seeing increased use?
- Concerning in-year pressures for Social Care, particularly Adult Social Care, what do we anticipate the progress on budget savings to be at the end of the year?
- Is the increase in Care Home placements short-term e.g. for those coming out of hospital or who need to recover from a fall, or is it a matter of those who have had their needs assessed and that is the best place for them?
- A huge amount of pressure is put on unpaid carers and family members to support individuals at home – can we understand more about that?
- Regarding children's placements, are we actively rebalancing services, looking to register more non-specialist placements? Or are those issues presenting specialist placements and we have no choice than to source from the market?
- Concerning the significant increase in providers fees, do we fully understand their costs and requirements?

- Is it correct that there has been a total deterioration of £686k in the deficit forecast between Month 6 and Month 9?
- What is the expectation of the actual forecast overspend in our services, as opposed to measures taken in-house to try to balance them, and what assumptions are being made for the budget about whether or not we will be in balance within our services by the end of next month?
- Is it correct that the three principal services that drive expenditure within the council have deteriorated by £617k between Month 6 and Month 9, and that the forecast overspend for the year for those services is now £5.04m? And if the deterioration in law, governance, and resources would take the forecast overspend to £5.1m for the year-end?
- In Highways, what is the explanation of why there is an underspend of £26k when we have seen an increased fee income of £339k?
- Can you expand on what the capital budget underspend of £3.5m and slippage means in terms of the delivery of capital projects, and how we are managing and using those funds?
- Regarding the time slippage for completion of King Henry school, is there a revised time for opening, at this stage?

Chair's Summary:

Thank you to the Cabinet Member and officers. We have considered a number of points including the provision of education to children, the transfer of additional responsibilities by the Welsh Government, recovery measures for overspending, the strength of forecasting, the deficit for Borough Theatre, the surplus for Newport Leisure Park, the cost of ALN transport from Carmarthenshire, the increase in income for Monmouth Leisure Centre, in-year pressures for Social Care, the increase in Care Home placements, the pressure on unpaid carers, children's placements, the increase in providers' fees, the deterioration in the deficit forecast, the expectation of the forecast overspend in services, the deterioration in the principal services that drive expenditure within the council, the underspend in Highways, the capital budget underspend and slippage, and the time slippage for the completion of King Henry school.

The recommendations and report were moved.