

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 26th July 2016

Lead Member / Officer: Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill /Richard Weigh, Head of Finance

Report Author: Steve Gadd, Chief Accountant

Title: Finance Report

1. What is the report about?

The report gives details of the council's revenue budget and savings as agreed for 2016/17. The report also provides a summary update of the Capital Plan as well as the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital Plan.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the council's current financial position and confirm the agreed service budgets for 2016/17.

3. What are the Recommendations?

Members note the budgets set for 2016/17 and progress against the agreed budget strategy.

4. Report details

The report provides a summary of the council's revenue budget for 2016/17 detailed in **Appendix 1**. The council's net revenue budget is £185.062m (£184.756m in 15/16). The position on service and corporate budgets is a forecast overspend of £0.402m. Narrative around the current risks and assumptions underlying this assessment are outlined in Section 6.

Savings of £5.2m were agreed as part of the budget and a summary of the savings is shown as **Appendix 2** which includes an initial assessment of the progress of the 2016/17 savings. This assessment shows that at this early stage 42% of savings have already been achieved, with a further 25% of savings making good progress (making a total of 67% likely to be achieved). More detailed work is ongoing around a number of savings that are currently being reviewed, the results of which will be reported on in future monitoring reports.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Effective management of the council's revenue and capital budgets and delivery of the agreed budget strategy underpins activity in all areas, including corporate priorities.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

Significant service narratives are shown in the following paragraphs.

Customers, Communications and Marketing is currently projected to overspend by £138k. The pressure is due to redundancy costs, higher than anticipated relief costs and delays in the achievement of savings. The savings are currently being reviewed as part of the overall review of 16/17 savings.

Finance is projecting to underspend by £37k due to staff vacancies. The staff vacancies are currently being reviewed in order to help deliver the required savings for 2017/18, while ensuring the service can still deliver the service during this difficult economic period for the council.

Highways and Environment Services – Although a £300k overspend is being recorded for this service, this is very much an indicative figure at this stage. The reasons for including an overspend at this stage are threefold:

- School Transport - the new policy applicable from September 2015, which was intended to resolve the ongoing budget pressure in this area, has been the subject of a number of appeals around the application of the policy. The resolution of the issues will involve an increase in ongoing School Transport costs as well as one-off specific legal costs.
- Additional costs will be incurred due to the recent failure of a local bus company. Plans are in place to cover both school and public transport routes but there will be additional costs involved, although at this early stage only estimates are available.
- The service is also facing pressures around the North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency contract - the service has reduced costs in order to limit the impact of the reductions in fee income that are currently known, however there remains a risk of further reductions in income and levels of work.

Although no specific variances are being reported on other services at this stage it is projected that the following services will need to identify management action in order to contain the following pressures within the overall budget:

- **Community Services** – inflationary pressures such as the implementation of the statutory National Living Wage (NLW) will result in an increase in care home fees. Although it is hoped the pressure in 16/17 can be contained within existing budgets and through the use of reserves, the annual increase in NLW will cause a significant pressure in future years. Community Services utilised reserves of £0.386m in 2015/16 in response to such pressures and it is currently projected that the service will need to use approximately £1m of reserves in 2016/17. These pressures are being considered as part of the 2017/18 budget process and Medium Term Financial Plan.
- There also remains a number of demand-led and therefore volatile budgets such as **Children's placements**. Reserves have been put in

place to help manage annual variances, however they remain areas of risk in 16/17 and beyond and will be monitored closely.

However services also have a healthy level of specific reserves and have been allowed to carry forward significant service underspends which are detailed in full in the Final Outturn Report for 2015/16. Also as part of the 16/17 budget process a one-year budget delivery contingency of £486k was set aside to mitigate the risks to the delivery of the budget including any delays in achievement of efficiency savings. A full review of all in-year and future service and strategic pressures is currently taking place as part of the 2017/18 budget process. The results of this exercise will be reported to Members in the Autumn.

Corporate – The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) includes a savings target of £1m for 2017/18. It is likely that some of these savings will be identified and achieved during 2016/17. Progress will be reported to Members during the coming months.

Schools – Although schools received protection of 1.85% (£1.173m) they have also had to find efficiency savings to fund inflationary pressures of approximately £2.5m. As reported last month it was likely that the reduction in School's balances seen during 2015/16 would continue in 2016/17. Initial assessments of projected balances show that at the end of June the projection for school balances is a net deficit balance of £0.687m, which is a reduction of £2.249m on the balances brought forward from 2015/16 (£1.562m). Schools are currently working closely with Education Finance colleagues on detailed financial plans for the new academic year and over the following two years to deliver long term balanced budgets. Further details on the progress of this process will be reported monthly to Cabinet through the Finance Report.

The **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**. The latest revenue position assumes an increase in balances at year end of £257k which is in line with the budgeted increase of £257k. HRA balances are forecast to be £2.861m at the end of the year. The Capital budget of £11.8m is allocated between planned improvements to existing housings stock (£8m) and new build developments (£3.8m).

Treasury Management – At the end of May, the council's borrowing totalled £190.165m at an average rate of 4.95%. Investment balances were £5.9m at an average rate of 0.25%.

A summary of the council's **Capital Plan** is enclosed as **Appendix 3**. The approved general capital plan is £34.5m with expenditure to date of £4.4m. Also included within Appendix 3 is the proposed expenditure of £31m on the **Corporate Plan**. **Appendix 4** provides an update on the major projects included in the Capital Plan.

Corporate Plan cash reserves at the beginning of 2016/17, are £2.050m. This is after taking account committed funding already transferred to the capital plan to fund expenditure in 2016/17 of £7m. Allowing for projected funding and

additional expenditure during the year, the Corporate Plan balance at the end of the year is estimated to be £4.7m.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision?

An EqIA has been completed for all relevant proposals included in the 2016/17 Budget.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

In addition to regular reports to the Corporate Governance Committee, the budget process has been considered by CET, SLT, Cabinet Briefing and Council Briefing meetings. Specific proposals were reviewed by scrutiny committees. There were regular budget workshops held with elected members to examine service budgets and consider the budget proposals. The council has consulted its partners through the joint Local Service. All members of staff were kept informed about the budget setting process and affected staff have been or will be fully consulted, in accordance with the council's HR policies and procedures. Trade Unions have been consulted through Local Joint Consultative Committee.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

It is important that services continue to manage budgets prudently and that any in-year surpluses are considered in the context of the medium-term financial position, particularly given the scale of budget reductions required over the coming two or three years.

Specific pressures are evident in social care budgets but will be contained in the current year and considered as part of the budget process for 2017/18. Forecasts indicate school balances will continue to decline and the position will be kept under close review.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

This remains a challenging financial period and failure to deliver the agreed budget strategy will put further pressure on services in the current and future financial years. Effective budget monitoring and control will help ensure that the financial strategy is achieved.

11. Power to make the Decision

Local authorities are required under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs.