

Report to	Cabinet
Date of meeting	28 th June 2022
Lead Member / Officer	Councillor Gwyneth Ellis, Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets / Steve Gadd, Head of Finance and Property
Report author	Steve Gadd, Head of Finance and Property
Title	Finance Report (May 2022/23 – including Budget Summary Report 2022/23)

1. What is the report about?

The report gives details of the council's revenue budget and savings as agreed for 2022/23. 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 2022/23.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 Members note the budgets set for 2022/23 and progress against the agreed strategy.

3.2 Members note the Budget Summary document included at Appendix 1 and, as in previous years, agree to its publication on the internet.

3.3 Members approve the write off of unrecoverable Business Rates as detailed in Section 6.9.

4. Report details

The Budget Summary Report for 2022/23 has been included as Appendix 1 which provides details of the council's revenue budget including departmental budget summaries, an update of the Capital Plan as well as the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital Plan.

The report provides a summary of the council's revenue budget for 2022/23 detailed in Appendix 2. The council's net revenue budget is £233.693m (£216.818m in 21/22). The position on service and corporate budgets is a forecast overspend of £1.000m. Narrative around the current risks and assumptions underlying this assessment are outlined in Section 6 and Appendix 3.

The 2022/23 budget required service savings and efficiencies of £0.754m to be identified and agreed as detailed below:

- Fees and Charges inflated in line with agreed Fees and Charges policy (£0.120m).
- Operational efficiencies (£0.634m) mostly identified by services throughout the year and within Head Service delegated responsibility in consultation with Lead Members.
- No savings were requested from Community Support Services or Schools.

The operational savings and fees and charges increases are assumed to have been achieved.

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 explaining variances and risks are detailed in Appendix 3 however the following should also be noted:

6.1 Impact of Corona Virus and Inflation - The strategy of working in partnership with Welsh Government helped secure over £15m direct financial help last year. We continue to claim for payments to Self-isolation and Statutory Sick Pay Enhancement payments, along with Free School Meals direct payments. A contingency of £1.9m was agreed as part of the budget for 22/23 to fund any ongoing impact of the pandemic which cannot be claimed from WG this and in recognition of the increases in inflation at the time the budget was set. Early indications are that whilst the risk due to covid has diminished considerably, the inflationary risk has increased largely due to the war in Ukraine. The position will be monitored closely over the coming months

6.2 Corporate Budgets – Although currently projected to break even the following risks are difficult to quantify at this early stage of the year:

- Pay settlements for 2022/23
- Call on contingencies relating to energy and other inflationary pressures (see 6.1)

These will be monitored closely over the coming months.

6.3 Education and Children's Service – The current outturn prediction is £1.088m overspend. Although an additional pressure of £750k was accepted as part of the agreed budget for 2022/23 this remains an area of concern. The majority of the pressure (£0.786m) relate to new residential and independent fostering placements, either which have commenced early this financial year or are now projected to continue longer than previously predicted (18 placements in total). The projected overspend assumes we will receive Welsh Government funding of £0.880m this year, although £0.300m of this is yet to be confirmed.

6.4 Community Support Service – Although an additional pressure of £3.127m was included in the budget for 2022/23 this service area remains a risk. Homelessness in particular remains an area of pressure. Although at this early stage we are hoping that the pressures will be able to be kept within the increased budget. As highlighted in the Final Outturn Report a service cash reserve of £2.440m is available to help fund any in year pressures.

6.5 Schools - The budget agreed by Council for 2022/23 included a total net additional investment (excluding increases in Welsh Government grants) in schools delegated budgets of just over £4.4m. The first monitoring period for schools is at the end of June

when they will be submitting detailed monitoring reports. School balances carried forward into 2022/23 amounted to a net credit balance of £12.448m, which represents an increase of £6.778m on the deficit balances brought forward into 2021/22 of £5.670m. The movement from last year largely relates to the receipt of one-off funding and one-off savings relating to schools being closed for much of the year and, in particular, a number of large grants were received at the end of March. Although this is really welcome the one-off nature of this funding should be born in mind. Much of the funding is committed to be utilised during 2022/23 to ensure schools and pupils continue to recover from the impact on the Covid pandemic. Education and Finance colleagues will work closely to help ensure that these balances are used in a timely and effective manner. There is a small underspend of £109k on non-delegated school budgets.

6.6 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The latest revenue position assumes a decrease in balances at year end of £4k as per the approved budget. HRA balances are therefore forecast to be £1.005m at the end of the year. The Capital budget of £22.8m is largely allocated between planned improvements to existing housing stock (£10m) and new build developments and acquisitions (£12.8m).

6.7 Treasury Management – At the end of May, the council’s borrowing totalled £230.372m at an average rate of 3.83%. Investment balances were £23.9m at an average rate of 0.59%.

6.8 A summary of the council’s **Capital Plan** is enclosed as Appendix 4. The approved capital plan is £62.64m with expenditure to date of £1.94m. Appendix 5 provides an update on the major projects included in the overall Capital Plan. The Capital Plan contingency has been increased by £1.676m to £2.176m (up from the £0.500m agreed in February). The increase is due to carrying forward the unhypothecated element of a capital grant received from WG in March. The increased contingency will help mitigate the risks to the overall programme of the impact of inflation on capital costs.

6.9 Denbighshire County Council (DCC) is required by legislation to administer and collect Business Rates on behalf of the Welsh Government. An annual bill is issued providing businesses 10 monthly instalments in which to pay. Failure to make payment will result in the issue of reminders, final notices and summonses to attend Magistrates’ Court.

However in some instances it is clear that no payments will be forthcoming and it is appropriate to consider writing the debt off. It is important that proper oversight is in place

for these decisions. Details of the two cases are included in Appendix 6 and we recommend that these debts are not recoverable and therefore should be written off.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

A Well-being Impact Assessments for the Council Tax rise was presented to Council on 25 January.

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 SLT, Cabinet Briefing, Group Leaders and Council Briefing meetings. The School Budget Forum have been included in the proposals through-out the year. Trade Unions have been consulted through Local Joint Consultative Committee. The Covid pandemic has continued to impact on the level of consultation and engagement with the public, however plans are in place to engage early with all stakeholders during the budget process for 2023/24.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

It is welcome that we enter this financial year in a lot better position than we feared thanks to the continued Covid support from Welsh Government the better than anticipated budget settlement for 22/23. As in previous years the early monitoring is showing pressures in Children's Services. Significant investment has gone into this area in recent years and it is expected that that need will continue. Initial pressures have already been included in the Medium Term Financial Plan and these will be kept under review, while the pressure for Children's Services will need to be reviewed in the coming months. The contingencies held corporately will not be released this early in the financial year but look to be sufficient to cover the service pressures.

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

This remains a challenging financial period and there is still uncertainty around the ongoing inflationary increases, Brexit and the financial strategy of the UK government in dealing with the long term financial impact on the public finances of the response to Covid and the cost of living crisis. Although the financial outlook looks uncertain, our finances are in a healthy position and a robust 3/5 year budget process has recently been approved by SLT, CET, Cabinet and scrutinised by the Governance and Audit Committee.

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.