

Public Report Cabinet

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet - 29 July 2024

Report Title

May 2024/25 Financial Monitoring Report

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan? Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Judith Badger, Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The report sets out the financial position as at the end of May 2024 and forecast for the remainder of the financial year, based on actual costs and income for the first two months of 2024/25. Financial performance is a key element within the assessment of the Council's overall performance framework and is essential to achievement of the objectives within the Council's policy agenda. To that end, this is the first financial monitoring report of a series of reports for the current financial year which will continue to be brought forward to Cabinet on a regular basis.

As at May 2024, the Council currently estimates an overspend of £4.6m for the financial year 2024/25. This is largely due to demand led pressures on Children's residential placements, Adults social care packages and home to school transport. In addition, the Council is still impacted by the inflationary pressures in the economy, even though inflation has fallen to 2.3%, the Council's base costs have significantly increased across the recent high inflation period. Increased costs across this period are also being felt by the social care market in particular, this is leading to market prices increasing at above inflation levels. Placing further pressures on the Council's Budget.

Early indications also suggest that the Local Government Pay Award will be higher than anticipated when setting the Council's Budget, the Council has no control over the level of pay award agreed.

Whilst the Directorate overspend which stands at £14.5m is concerning, elements of this overspend were forecast and two key Budget contingencies were created as part of setting the Council's Budget and MTFS for 2024/25. The Council set a Social Care Contingency of £3.4m and a Corporate Budget Provision of £3.5m to support anticipated pressures across Social Care and Home to School Transport, whilst detailed review work of these services is undertaken and operational improvements are delivered to reduce cost pressures and create cost avoidance.

The Council's Treasury Management Strategy continues to perform well with the Council's approach to borrowing adapted to minimise the level of borrowing and borrow short term to ultimately minimise interest costs. This position has also improved due to re-profiling of capital programme delivery, which pushes back the need to borrow. It is estimated that this approach should see the Council generate savings of at least £3m for 2024/25, though again market conditions are out of the Council's control.

As a result of these corporate provisions and savings, an underspend of £9.9m is forecast within Central Services bringing the Councils net overspend down to £4.6m.

There remains funding uncertainty for the local government sector beyond 2024/25 as the Local Government financial settlement was again only a one-year allocation and the pending national Government elections create further uncertainty. These challenges faced by the Council are mirrored across the UK as Council's continue to face significant challenges in regards to the funding of social care and meeting the costs of rising demand. This is perhaps best illustrated by the volume of Local Authorities across the UK that have recently hit difficult times with a number having to issue S114 notices.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 1. Note the current General Fund Revenue Budget forecast overspend of £4.6m.
- 2. Note that actions will continue to be taken to reduce the overspend position but that it is possible that the Council will need to draw on its reserves to balance the 2024/25 financial position.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Equalities Impact Assessment Appendix 2 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

Budget and Council Tax 2024/25 Report to Council on 28th February 2024 Finance Update 2023/24 to Cabinet on 10th June 2024

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

May Financial Monitoring 2024/25

1. Background

- 1.1 As part of its performance and control framework the Council is required to produce regular and timely reports for the Strategic Leadership Team and Cabinet to keep them informed of financial performance so that, where necessary, actions can be agreed and implemented to bring expenditure in line with the approved budget for the financial year.
- 1.2 Delivery of the Council's Revenue Budget, Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Capital Programme within the parameters agreed by Council is essential if the Council's objectives are to be achieved. Financial performance is a key element within the assessment of the Council's overall performance framework.
- 1.3 This report is the first in a series of financial monitoring reports to Cabinet for 2024/25, setting out the projected year end revenue budget financial position in light of actual costs and income for the first two months of the financial year.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Table 1 below shows, by directorate, the summary forecast revenue outturn position.

Table 1: Forecast Revenue Outturn 2024/25 as at May 2024

| Directorate | Budget 2024/25 | Forecast Outturn 2024/25 | Forecast Variance over/under (-) |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| | £m | £m | £m |
| Children and Young People's Services | 66.6 | 71.9 | 5.3 |
| Adult Care, Housing & Public Health | 122.8 | 128.2 | 5.4 |
| Regeneration and Environment Services | 44.7 | 48.8 | 4.1 |
| Finance and Customer Services | 33.7 | 33.7 | 0.0 |
| Assistant Chief Executive | 7.7 | 7.4 | -0.3 |
| Central Services | 50.6 | 40.7 | -9.9 |
| Directorate Forecast Outturn | 326.1 | 330.7 | 4.6 |
| | | | |
| Dedicated Schools Grant | | | 0.3 |
| Housing Revenue Account (HRA) | | | -0.4 |

As at May 2024, the Council currently estimates a directorate overspend of £14.5m for the financial year 2024/25.

The Council's overspend position at this point is largely due to the following overall issues:

- Placement pressures within Children and Young People's Services (£4.2m) and Adults Social Care (£4.3m).
- Home to School Transport pressures within Regeneration and Environment (£2.5m) and Children and Young People's Services (£1.1m).
- Provider inflation impacting Children and Young People's Services. The impact on CYPS is on fostering allowances and skills payments that have been uplifted based on the national minimum allowance and the estimated impact that these uplifts may have on provider payments for Independent Fostering Agencies and external residential placements.
- Increased costs of homelessness due to increased demand.
- Pressure across waste management on staffing and vehicle costs, disposal costs and related income.
- Impact of the Local Government Association (LGA) Pay Award. The Council's current forecast assumes an increase in pay award based on the LGA pay offer.
- Whilst the Directorate overspend is concerning, elements of this overspend were forecast and two key Budget contingencies were created as part of setting the Council's Budget and MTFS for 2024/25. The Council set a Social Care Contingency of £3.4m and a Corporate Budget Provision of £3.5m to support anticipated pressures across Social Care and Home to School Transport. In addition, the Council's Treasury Management Strategy continues to generate savings to support the Council's budget, with £3m currently estimated for 2024/25. As a result of these corporate provisions and savings, an underspend of £9.9m is forecast within Central Services bringing the Councils net overspend down to £4.6m.
- 2.4 Although inflation has fallen considerably since its peak in 2023/24, the impact has been an increase in the base cost of services that remains high, and it is this cost on which future inflation is applied. As such, the Council will continue to face financial pressures that will need to be managed and mitigated through the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Council's reserves.
- 2.5 The forecast position will continue to be monitored closely and mitigations identified to improve the position, though it is possible that the Council will need to call on reserves to achieve a balanced outturn. The Council will look to develop savings recovery plans to identify areas where the Council can reduce costs and create cost avoidance moving forwards to mitigate the pressures faced. To support this, deep dive budget review sessions have been developed across the key pressure areas identified at 2.2 of this report.
- 2.6 The Council will need to ensure that mitigating actions are taken to reduce the current directorate forecast outturns along with ensuring that savings plans are delivered on time to mitigate any further impact on future years Medium Term Financial Planning. The Council has shown in recent years its ability to pull back

- significant overspends in year, though the position is of course challenging in the current financial climate.
- 2.7 The Council's Budget and Council Tax report 2024/25 included the delivery of £9.904m of previously agreed savings, to be delivered across the Directorates. At present, £3.433m of delivery has been secured. The biggest challenges at present on delivery relate to CYPS Placements, which is forecast as a significant cost pressure again in 2024/25 indicating that the Council hasn't fully delivered the savings programme.
- 2.8 The table below shows the total amount of all savings to be delivered during 2024/25 and the amount that has been delivered to date. More detail on savings delivery will be provided in the next financial monitoring report to Cabinet.

Table 2: Delivery of Agreed Savings

| Directorate | 2024/25 Saving to be delivered | Secured as at 31 st May 2024 | Still to be delivered |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------|
| Finance and Customer Services | 238 | 238 | 0 |
| Assistant Chief Executive | 407 | 314 | 93 |
| Adult Care, Housing and Public Health | 1,998 | 1,280 | 718 |
| Children's and Young Peoples Services | 5,850 | 1,059 | 4,791 |
| Regeneration and Environment | 1,411 | 542 | 869 |
| Total | 9,904 | 3,433 | 6,471 |

2.9 The following sections provide further information regarding the Council's forecast outturn of £4.6m, the key reasons for forecast under or overspends within directorates and the progress of savings delivery.

Children and Young People Services Directorate (£5.3m forecast overspend)

2.10 Children & Young People Services has a budget pressure of £5.3m at the end of May 2024 primarily driven by pressures in Children's Social Care and Education. In the main the overall pressures relate to children in care placements costs (£4.2m) and home to school transport (£1.1m).

- 2.11 The placements forecast pressure of £4.2m for May is consistent with the placement projections and plan for the year agreed with Service Management. The agreed placement plan includes the full year impact of the remaining budget savings of £4.791m agreed in previous budget rounds and profiled for delivery in 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- 2.12 The actual placement number at the end of May is 496 and compares favourably to the budget profile of 506 for the month. However, the number of external residential care placements (45 at end of May compared to planned profile of 42) continue to exert overall pressure against the children in care placement budget. The number of new external residential placements for the period to May (9) is higher than profile, although offset to a degree by the number of exits from care and step-downs (-6).
- 2.13 The placement position is reflecting that the Council continues to make progress reducing the overall cost of placements year on year and is reducing demand. However, the placement mix and complexity of care placements remain the most significant challenge for the Council in this Directorate. The in-house residential programme, Pathway to Care programme and the increase of accommodation options for 16+ placements should help to alleviate these pressures. It should be noted that the number of UASC continues to impact demand levels and placement options available for step downs.
- 2.14 A forecast overspend of £1.1m is currently anticipated against the CYPS home to school transport budget, which is similar to the outturn position in 2023/24. The pressure reflects demands on transporting children in care (£0.3m) and post 16 & post 19 EHCP learners (£0.8m). CYPS have operational groups set up to review transport costs to ensure the most appropriate method of transport is in place.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) (£0.3m forecast overspend)

- 2.15 The following outlines the forecast position on the delegated and central Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets. An overall net surplus budget balance of £0.9m is currently forecast for all 25 maintained schools in Rotherham for 2024/25 based on submitted budget plans. This is a reduction of £1.4m compared to the 2023/24 outturn schools' budget position and reflects increased cost pressures schools are facing in the current year. Within this there are 3 schools with forecast budget deficits for 2024/25 totalling £149k. A budget recovery plan would be agreed with these schools to bring the budget back into a surplus position within an agreed timeframe.
- 2.16 A cost pressure of £1.2m is currently forecast for central DSG budgets and mainly relates to the high needs budget. The cost pressure is consistent with the Safety Valve agreement and reflects the demand pressures in the SEND system, namely, inflationary costs; increase in EHCP pupils in mainstream schools, resource provision and special schools; and continuing placements in out of authority independent specialist settings. The high needs budget / forecast for the year includes the impact of the SEND sufficiency plan aimed at increasing the number of local SEND places to reduce out of authority specialist placements.

2.17 The latest DSG reserve account (inclusive of the above forecast in-year high needs deficit and safety valves funding payments from DfE) shows an overall deficit of £1.4m in 2024/25 and £0.5m in 2025/26 (final year of the Safety Valve programme). The deficit in 2025/26 presents a financial risk to the Council, as the statutory protection of DSG deficits would be removed from the end of 2025 under current legislation.

Adult Care, Housing and Public Health (£5.4m forecast overspend)

- **2.18** The overall directorate forecast is an overspend of £5.4m, made up of pressures in Adult Social Care (£4.3m) and homelessness (£1.1m).
- 2.19 The cost of care packages are forecast to be £4.3m overspent. The two main areas of pressure are older people and mental health support, due to increased numbers of people in older people's residential and nursing care and in mental health provision. The biggest increases have been in residential care and domiciliary care. This includes some high-cost packages. The forecast assumes that all current placements remain for the rest of the year although they may reduce. Overall movements in numbers will be closely monitored as the year progresses and additional income from Continuing Healthcare (CHC) may offset some of these costs. Staffing budgets are forecast to be £217k underspent due to vacancies. These are offset in large part by agency placements that provide cover for the service.
- 2.20 A focus on preventative enablement work will look at reducing the numbers of people who go on to need long term support as part of a full review of services. A series of recovery plans that aim to help reduce the cost pressures across the Directorate are being developed. More detailed work is required to assess the viability of these options, the pace at which they could be implemented and the impact they might have.
- 2.21 Neighbourhood Services (Housing) is forecast to overspend by £1.1m. Homelessness is expected to overspend by £1.2m after accounting for grant income. This is due to expenditure on hotels as numbers of people seeking support remain high. At the end of May 2024 there were 74 households in hotels, down from a high of 87 in April and this is actively being reduced further. Work is on-going to identify and source alternative temporary accommodation and 16 new properties are due to come on-line in the autumn. Further work is required to assess the forecast demand across the financial year.
- **2.22** Public Health is forecast to budget at this stage.

Regeneration and Environment Directorate (£4.1m forecast overspend)

2.23 The first outturn projection for the directorate indicates a forecast pressure of £4.1m for this financial year. The forecast outturn projection includes the following specific budget issues.

- 2.24 Community Safety and Street Scene (CSS) is forecasting an overall net pressure of £3.6m. The most significant pressure continues to be in respect of Home to School Transport where early forecasting indicates an overspend of £2.5m, due to ongoing demographic pressures leading to an increase in the number of new eligible passengers and fewer contractors in the market leading to increased prices. To address the increased costs and demand a range of solutions are being explored to influence demand and maximise savings opportunities, using improved cost data analysis to support plans to implement lower cost routes. As such, at present, the forecast is based on the outturn 2023/24, as the new cohort of passengers won't be known until September 2024.
- 2.25 Parking Services is forecasting a pressure of £303k. The ongoing economic impact on town centre footfall continues to see a reduction in income from parking charges. The forecast will be reviewed throughout the year to assess the impact from the Forge Island development once it is fully open.
- 2.26 Waste Management is currently forecasting an overspend of £1.3m. There is pressure on vehicle costs due to hire and repair costs of an ageing fleet, an increase in staff costs to cover sickness absence, increase in waste disposal cost based on tonnage estimates and a forecast shortfall in income from the sale of recycling materials due to lower market prices. These pressures were mitigated in 2023/24 by the £1m overachievement of budgeted income on pellet sales driven by the increased energy prices. Pressures in the service are being mitigated by a forecast underspend of £545k in community services delivery due to vacancies across the service and forecast overachievement of income budgets.
- 2.27 Culture Sport and Tourism (CST) is forecasting an overall pressure of £195k. There is a forecast overspend of £180k at Waleswood Caravan Park following an early assessment of income levels after poor weather has impacted pitch availability. There are also expected shortfalls in income at Rother Valley Country Park of £36k and Thrybergh Country Park of £52k. In addition, there is pressure on the music service and events budgets. These pressures are offset by an anticipated saving on the Leisure PFI of £167k following the benchmarking exercise.
- 2.28 Planning, Regeneration and Transport (PRT) is forecasting an overall pressure of £341k. The pressure is largely due to the ongoing forecast shortfall in Markets income arising from void stalls amid ongoing difficult trading conditions and an anticipated overspend on building control driven by a shortfall in budgeted income and the forecast cost of agency staffing to cover sickness and vacancies. These pressures are partly offset by the use of grant income across the RIDO service and an expected overachievement of planning income.

Finance and Customer Services (£0.0m forecast overspend)

2.29 The overall directorate is reporting a balanced position. Although there is an overspend of £793k arising from Property and Facilities Services which has transferred from Regeneration & Environment Services, the directorate intends to resolve those cost pressures in year where possible. The remaining services

within the Directorate are forecasting a net balanced outturn position. Whilst there are some financial challenges within the wider directorate, projected savings on Legal disbursements and Bereavement Services income are expected to offset those pressures along with robust budget management.

- 2.30 As referenced above, with effect from 1st April 2024, responsibility for Property & Facilities Services has transferred to Finance & Customer Services Directorate. The early forecast position for Property & Facilities Services is an overspend of £793k (outturn for these services in 2023/24 was an overspend of £1.3m). Property Services is forecasting a pressure of £1.3m with forecast shortfalls on income across estates and the commercial portfolio, increased costs on business rates, cleaning, maintenance and fixtures and fittings. There is pressure in school catering of £404k due to the continuing impact of inflation which is an improved position from 2023/24 due to the forecast increase in income from the increased fees and charges. This is offset by a forecast underspend on building cleaning and caretaking plus other minor budget areas of £911k mainly due to additional income. The Finance & Customer Services Directorate will aim to develop recovery plans to address the overspend within Property & Facilities Services and bring it back within budget.
- 2.31 Within Customer, Information and Digital Services, increased costs on postage and print are under review. Ongoing recruitment challenges are creating a temporary cost reduction, which is offset by over-recruitment within Customer Services contact centre to help manage the difficulties caused by high staff turnover in this area, that impacts on call waiting times.
- 2.32 Legal Services faces continued demand for legal support with child protection hearings and court case costs relating to Looked After Children. Ongoing difficulties in recruiting to key posts are currently resulting in the extended use of locum solicitors and external suppliers. However, the number of cases remains volatile and will continue to be monitored closely.

Assistant Chief Executive (£0.3m underspend)

2.33 The service is currently forecasting an underspend of £262k. Contributing factors include projected income for the services of the CEX to Nottingham City Council for 2 days per week for the full year, along with additional income from salary sacrifice schemes. Staffing is also forecast to be underspent due to a number of vacancies across the directorate.

Central Services (£9.9m underspend)

2.34 Central Services has a £9.9m forecast underspend, made up of budget provisions set aside when the Budget was approved. A Social Care Contingency of £3.4m and a Corporate Budget Provision of £3.5m to support anticipated pressures across Social Care and Home to School Transport are being used to support the wider Directorates forecast position, along with a £3m forecast underspend from Treasury Management.

- 2.35 There continues to be significant financial challenges as a result of increased costs, energy prices and the potential impact of the 2024/25 Local Government Pay Award. The impact on base costs of high inflation in recent years continues to impact the renewal of Council contracts and payments to key service providers. As such it continues to present a financial challenge to the Council's approved Budget and MTFS. However, the Council was able to build into the Council's Budget and Council Tax Report 2024/25 greater levels of funding to manage the impact of inflation, energy and pay. As such it is currently anticipated that these impacts can be controlled within the existing budgetary provision. As stated within the Budget and Council Tax Report 2024/25 uncertainty in the global and UK economy remains a significant budget risk and as such will need to continue to be closely monitored.
- 2.36 The current economic climate remains turbulent, with challenges in projecting where inflation will move and the pace at which it moves. Though the recent trajectory has seen inflation fall to 2.0% (May 2024), this is not negative inflation and as such the Council's costs are still significantly higher than they were when inflation first started to spike above the Bank of England's 2% target. CPI has now been above this 2% target for 33 months, seeing the CPI index increase by 23.4 points in that period. Although inflation has fallen considerably since its peak in 2023/24, the impact was that the resulting increased base cost of services remains high, and it is this cost on which future inflation is applied. As such, the Council will continue to face financial pressures that will need to be managed and mitigated through the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Council's reserves.
- 2.37 However, energy prices are gradually starting to reduce which will help support the Council's Budget position for 2024/25, though it is too early in the financial year to be clear on its full benefit.
- 2.38 The Council's Treasury Management functions are expected to continue to perform well for the bulk of 2024/25. The Council still holds cash balances and is able to invest them for a greater return given current high interest rates and additional slippage on the Capital programme in 2023/24 means that the level of financing costs for 2024/25 will be less than anticipated. The benefits from the Treasury Management function can be used to support wider inflationary pressures that the Council will face during 2024/25, however it should be noted that as the Capital programme progresses, these short-term opportunities will diminish.
- 2.39 The Central Services budgets are made up of a number of corporate budgets for levies and charges such as the Integrated Transport Levy (ITA), PFI Financing, and Treasury Management. A list of the main budget areas within Central Services was provided as part of the Council's Budget and Council Tax Report 2024/25, approved at Council on 28th February 2024. The costs within this area are largely fixed costs, set out prior to the start of a financial year, not specific to a particular Directorate and are therefore not controllable by the directorates and thus held centrally.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) (£0.4m forecast underspend)

- 2.40 The Housing Revenue Account is a statutory ring-fenced account that the Council has to maintain in respect of the income and expenditure incurred in relation to its council dwellings and associated assets. The HRA is currently forecast to underspend by £395k.
- The underspend largely relates to increased stock numbers as there are more properties being rented than originally anticipated. Increased fee rates have also brought in more income.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 With regard to the current forecast net revenue budget overspend of £14.5m that the directorates are forecasting, further management actions continue to be identified with the clear aim of ensuring a balanced budget position can be achieved. It is currently assumed that to achieve a balanced outturn position there will be a need to utilise an element of the Council's reserves given the significant pressures that are being faced. This is in recognition that there are still financial implications that need to be fully understood and that may not be fully known until later in the financial year. It is nationally recognised best practice to monitor the performance against the agreed revenue budgets and the Capital Programme throughout the year.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The Council consulted on the proposed budget for 2024/25, as part of producing the Budget and Council Tax Report 2024/25. Details of the consultation are set out in the Budget and Council Tax 2024/25 report approved by Council on 28th February 2024.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 Strategic Directors, Managers and Budget Holders will ensure ongoing tight management and close scrutiny of spend this financial year.
- Financial Monitoring reports are taken to Cabinet meetings during the year. The Financial Outturn report for 2024/25 will be taken to Cabinet in July 2025.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 The Council's overspend position is detailed within the report along with the estimated impact of current financial pressures from inflation and increases in demand. This position continues to be monitored closely. Control over spending remains critical to both maintaining the robust Reserves Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- An update on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy will be provided to Cabinet later in 2024. This will provide a more detailed update on the Council's

Medium Term Financial Planning factoring in the impact of the current year financial pressures and the longer-term impacts on the MTFS and reserves strategy.

- 6.3 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in this report. Project specific implications have been addressed in the Key Issues section.
- 7. Legal Advice and Implications
- **7.1** No direct legal implications.
- 8. Human Resources Advice and Implications
- **8.1** No direct implications.
- 9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults
- **9.1** The report includes reference to the cost pressures on both Children's and Adult Social care budget.
- 10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications
- 10.1 This is a finance update report, providing a review of current progress to date on the Council's revenue and capital budgets, any equalities and human rights impacts from service delivery have been or will be detailed as service budgets, capital projects are pulled together for inclusion within the Council's revenue budget or capital programme.
- 11 Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change
- **11.1** No direct implications.
- 12. Implications for Partners
- 12.1 At a time of economic difficulty and tight financial constraints, managing spend in line with the Council's budget is paramount. Careful scrutiny of expenditure and income across all services and close budget monitoring therefore remain a top priority if the Council is to deliver both its annual and medium term financial plans while sustaining its overall financial resilience
- 13. Accountable Officers

Rob Mahon, Assistant Director - Financial Services

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers:-

| | Named Officer | Date |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Chief Executive | Sharon Kemp | 12/07/24 |
| | OBE | |
| Strategic Director of Finance & | Judith Badger | 27/06/24 |
| Customer Services | | |
| (S.151 Officer) | | |
| Assistant Director, Legal Services | Phillip Horsfield | 28/06/24 |
| (Monitoring Officer) | - | |

Report Author: Rob Mahon, Assistant Director – Financial Services This report is published on the Council's <u>website</u>.