

## Minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

9<sup>th</sup> January, 2019 at 4.30pm  
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

**Present:** Councillor P Hughes (Chair);  
Councillor Ahmed.

**Apology:** Councillors E M Giles, Rollins and Underhill.

**In attendance:** Councillor Downing (Vice-Chair – Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board);  
D Carter (Executive Director – Resources);  
C Davey (Business Partner – Adults);  
S Lilley (Business Partner – Finance).

### 1/19 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meetings held on 10<sup>th</sup> October and 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2018 be approved as correct records.

### 2/19 **2018/19 Budget Monitoring – Quarter 2**

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018, had referred the Council-wide budget monitoring report for Quarter 2 for consideration by the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board.

Details of the Council's revenue and capital expenditure as at the end of September 2018 were received by the Board.

At a service level, excluding Public Health and the Housing Revenue Account, there was a forecast year-end surplus of £4.171m made up as follows:

Corporate Management – balanced budget;  
Resources – deficit of surplus of £0.034m;  
Adults Social Care – surplus of £4.272m;  
Children's Services – deficit of £0.227m;  
Regeneration and Growth – surplus of £0.233m;

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

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Housing and Communities – deficit of £0.123m;  
Central Items – surplus of £0.050m.

In addition, there was a projected year end surplus of £1.530m within Public Health that related to ring fenced funds carried forward from previous years.

The Board noted the reasons for the variances at the end of Quarter 2 for each service area.

The forecast outturn for individual directorates assumed that a total of £5.717m of Corporate Resources would be used to support expenditure. This meant that the projected year-end deficit for the Council would be £1.546m.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

### **Corporate Management**

- The adjustment to the West Midlands Combined Authority budget reflected movement of funding previously held in contingency pending the agreement of the Council's contribution to the Combined Authority.
- Only a small amount of expenditure in relation to the agile working area at Providence Place had taken place so far. The remaining budget would be utilised on office refurbishment works to support agile working in that building.

### **Resources**

- There had been a transfer from Adult Services to fund the locking of cemetery gates, which had previously been undertaken by the Warden Service. Warden activities and working patterns had changed following the transfer of the service to the Prevention and Protection directorate which meant they could no longer fulfil that role. The transferred funds would cover the costs associated with ensuring alternative arrangements for locking cemetery gates were in place. Similar discussions were underway relating to the locking of park gates.
- The Social Fund Reserve would be fully utilised in 2018-19. Additional funds had been earmarked to extend that scheme into future years.

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- The earmarked reserves in relation to Sandwell Children's Trust would fund residual costs from the creation of the Trust.
- The costs concerning the interim support to the Monitoring Officer and corporate legal charges related to the standards and audit cases that were now largely concluded and the need for additional capacity to support the General Data Protection Regulations implementation.
- The Graduate Leader Scheme had supported a wide variety of projects over the last 12 months including the Commonwealth Games, the Workplace Vision, Black Country Core Strategy Review, Vision 2030, Modern Day Slavery and the Member Development Programme.
- The projected overspend in ICT was to meet the licensing costs for Oracle and Microsoft products. This had previously been agreed by Cabinet to be met from Corporate Resources.
- The projected overspend in Law and Governance was largely due to additional costs arising from increasing demand in Children's Social Care services.

### **Adult Social Care**

- During 2018-19 the Therapy Service received additional funding from the Better Care Fund to increase Occupational Therapist capacity. Although new staff were recruited, existing staff had also left the authority during that time. The Chair suggested that Riverside could be approached to provide additional Occupational Therapist capacity.
- The Vulnerable Home Owners Kick Start was originally funded from the West Midlands Kickstart Partnership. It was used for urgent works on Private Sector Housing repairs. Members requested further details on any access criteria for this fund.
- Slippage relating to capital expenditure on Vulnerable Home Owners Improvements was because the authority focused on utilising the government's Disabled Facilities Grant resources first before other resources held by the Council.

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- The Passenger Transfer Unit was the centralised management of all social care transport for the Council. Following the creation of Sandwell Children's Trust and subsequent restructures, the budgets for adult social care drivers and vehicles were being returned to Adult Social Care directorate control.
- Underspends across the directorate were a result of service efficiencies and recruitment restrictions to manage budget pressures in 2018-19 and 2019-20.
- In early 2018-19 Adult Social Care successfully negotiated an increase in the value of the Improved Better Care Fund which could be used to protect adult social care and the service was also awarded a one-off grant to support pressures in the social care system.

### **Regeneration and Growth**

- Although some service areas may have had a surplus, budget variances were not ring-fenced to specific services as there may be offsetting variances within other areas of the Regeneration and Growth directorate. Members expressed concern that due to rent concessions for West Bromwich indoor market causing a budget deficit in that service, underspends in important services across the Regeneration and Growth directorate were being used to meet that deficit rather than be used on projects within their own service areas.
- The West Midlands Regional Housing Research budget funded research proposals against regionally-agreed priorities including housing delivery, housing needs, homelessness, supported housing and existing stock condition.
- The projected expenditure in Strategic Assets and Land Service included a programme of property demolition. This would be funded from Corporate Resources.

### **Housing and Communities**

- There had been issues with staff retention within the Contact Centre. This was thought to be due to terms and conditions relating to leave and shifts in that service being less flexible than other departments, as well as the role providing a good overview of Council services which could assist in successfully applying for other posts within the authority.

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- It was planned to move to online completion of housing repairs request, which could potentially reduce the number of calls received by the Contact Centre.
- The Sports Grants process for both clubs and gifted and talented athletes was accessibly online and was promoted through a range of media.
- It was not expected to recoup any of the costs arising from the new Aquatics Centre and the Commonwealth Games.
- The Transforming Local Services project had not delivered on the savings target, which resulted in the overspend in Communities and Partnerships. In 2019-20 alternative savings proposals had been identified throughout the Neighbourhood directorate.
- The increase in emergency placements had caused a need for additional temporary accommodation which resulted in additional costs. Members suggested that off-site construction methods could be used to provide 'pod' style units to provide temporary accommodation.
- There were approximately 30 different Grot Spot schemes currently ongoing, spread across all the towns within the borough.

### **Children's Services**

- The overspend in Inclusive Learning was due to the costs associated with home to school transport for pupils with Special Educational Needs. It was reported that Procurement Services were supporting the service to use the current contracting arrangements more efficiently, but the impact of this was not yet clear.
- The Early Help element of the Children's Trust contract was being funded from Central Items – it would be built into the budget in future years.

### **Public Health**

- From the concerns raised by members, Mindfulness and Mental Health and the Better Health Programme were referred to the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board.

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### Housing Revenue Account

- The notification of changes to service charges were delayed for a number of reasons including staff turnover and associated loss of process knowledge. The increases were therefore implemented with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2019.

The Chair thanked officers for attending the meeting.

### Resolved:-

- (1) that the Director – Education, Skills and Employment submit a report to the Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board on transport provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs;
- (2) that the Executive Director – Resources arrange for the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board to visit Providence Place;
- (3) that an update on the resourcing of locking arrangements for parks and cemeteries be provided as part of the Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring report to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board;
- (4) that the Executive Director – Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing investigate the possibility of working with Riverside to increase Occupational Therapy capacity;
- (5) that the Executive Director – Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing provide clarification to Scrutiny on the access criteria for the Vulnerable Home Owners Kick Start;
- (6) that awareness building on the various grants, initiatives and programmes to assist vulnerable or elderly home owners be included as part of the Member Development programme;
- (7) that the Director – Regeneration and Growth submit a report to the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board on the review of Indoor Markets;

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- (8) that the Director – Regeneration and Growth submit a report to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board on the Property Services External Review;
- (9) that the Director – Regeneration and Growth provide Scrutiny with detail of the projects funded through the West Midlands Regional Housing Research budget;
- (10) that the relevant Scrutiny Board be informed of any service realignments or restructures within Regeneration and Growth;
- (11) that the Executive Director – Resources and Director – Housing and Communities submit a report to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board on the contact centre and related digital workstreams;
- (12) that Cabinet be recommended to consider off-site construction units, for example one-bedroom pod style units, for providing temporary accommodations to homeless people;
- (13) that the Director – Housing and Communities provide Scrutiny with:-
  - (a) details on the areas and schemes identified for Grot Spot funding.;
  - (b) clarification on the use of Section 106 monies relating to Leabrook Road, Wednesbury;
- (14) that the Director – Public Health submit a report to the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board on the Better Health Programme and programmes related to Mindfulness and Mental Health.

(Meeting ended at 6.48 pm)

Contact Officer: Alex Goddard Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3178
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