

13 October 2016		ITEM: 9
Children's Overview & Scrutiny Committee		
Council Spending Review Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Sean Clark, Director of Finance and IT		
Accountable Head of Service: Sean Clark, Director of Finance and IT		
Accountable Director: Sean Clark, Director of Finance and IT		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

This report summarises the main changes to the MTFS for the period 2017/18 through to 2019/20 and the governance structure for the Council Spending Review and Transformation Programme, including the budget planning table enabling agreement of the budget in February 2017.

This report specifically updates the committee on the proposals currently being considered that will affect Children's Services budgets.

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the revised MTFS position, and the Council Spending Review approach and timetable.**
- 1.2 That Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**

2 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

- 2.1** The MTFS presented to Council in February 2016 shows the budget gap over the 3 years 2017/18 to 2019/20 as £18.443m. This already assumes delivery of £2.534m savings previously agreed for 2017/18 (see Appendix 1) and assumes a Council Tax increase of 3.99% in each year.
- 2.2** As part of the ongoing budget planning process, the MTFS has been updated to reflect latest assumptions. The table below sets out the movements from the previous position and revised budget gap.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	Total
February 2016	7.378	6.098	4.967	18.443
Business Rates	0.399	0.663	(0.463)	0.599
Inflation	(0.285)	(0.071)	(0.071)	(0.427)
Capital Financing	-	(0.042)	0.591	0.549
Government Grant	-	-	1.785	1.785
Revised Budget Gap	7.492	6.648	6.809	20.949

2.3 The key movements include:

- The position for 2017/18 and 2018/19 reflects a reduction in the provision for inflation but, adversely, also the possible impact of a significant category of business rate appeals that have been lodged;
- The majority of the increase is expected in 2019/20 and is largely as a result of further analysis on the four year funding settlement. It is prudent, at this stage, to reduce down the level of grant and business rate support in light of discussions on the removal or reduction of New Homes Bonus and further comments on grant levels; and
- The increase in Capital Financing reflects the likely interest rate increases towards the end of the MTFs period. This increased cost has been offset with significant savings in 2016/17 and smaller reductions over the following two years as a result of pushing back the impact in light of current economic forecasts.

2.4 One off funding has been identified to meet the costs of a Clean It, Cut It, Fill It pilot. The results of this pilot will be used to determine whether growth is required in the budget for a permanent increase to the Environment and Place budgets and this will be reported once known.

2.5 The position above includes the assumption of a 3.99% increase in council tax each year – 1.99% general increase and 2% adult social care precept. The table below sets out how any reductions to this assumption will increase the deficits set out in paragraph 2.2:

An increase of:	Increases the budget gap by (£m)			
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	Total
3.99%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
3.00%	0.570	0.585	0.605	1.760
2.00%	1.140	1.170	1.210	3.520
1.00%	1.710	1.755	1.815	5.280
0.00%	2.280	2.340	2.420	7.040

3 Council Spending Review Process and Timetable

3.1 Given the level of saving previously delivered across the council, the pressures identified in 2016/17 and that there are minimal reserves to call

upon, it is essential that there is a clear strategy to close the budget gap set out in the MTF5. As a result, the focus will be on 3 key areas:

- Income generation – including increasing the Council’s commercial trading base. Council Tax increases also fall under this category;
- Achieving more / same for less – including further transformational projects, contract reviews, spend to save initiatives and alternative delivery models; and
- Demand management / early intervention. Examples include the Local Area Co-ordinators and Community Hubs.

3.2 However, where the budget gap cannot be fully closed through the above, the likely solution will be reductions to, or full cessation of, service provision.

3.3 Crossing through all of these areas is the need to adapt our workforce and change our culture to be an organisation which is more entrepreneurial, digitally-minded and commercially-aware.

3.4 The Council Spending Review will be underpinned by the following principles.

- Becoming financially self-sustainable;
- A target of 15-20% efficiencies in each service;
- A review of all services by March 2019 using common design principles (customer / demand management, commercial, ICT / digital, people, procurement, property and process);
- Non-statutory income generating services should be cost neutral; and
- Outcome focused including consideration of prevention and early intervention.

3.5 There has been some discussion that the Service Review is a top slice approach. It is important to note that the intention of these reviews is more a focus on making the use of financial, physical and people assets more efficient through challenging service delivery on the principles set out above.

3.6 The transformation framework for achieving this is set out in the governance structure in Appendix 2. The officer Transformation Board will oversee a number of Strategic Boards each with a specific focus and cross cutting membership. Each Strategic Board will be sponsored by a member of Directors Board and guided by the principles outlined above and strategic policy direction set by Members. The governance structure also includes the cross-party Council Spending Review Panel.

3.7 The timing of these reviews is set out at Appendix 3.

Growth	Performance
Customer Service & Demand Management	Commercial
ICT / Digital	People
Procurement	Property
Service Review	

3.8 The Council Spending Review timetable has been prepared to achieve agreement of the budget by Cabinet and Council in February 2017. The main milestones are summarised below:

- July/August 2016 – Officer boards identify proposals and estimated savings for consultation with Cabinet Members;
- 7th September 2016 – Cabinet consider Q1 budget update including budget planning timetable and governance;
- September 2016 – Council Spending Review Panel (cross-party with Group Leaders and Deputies) consider savings options ahead of consultation;
- October/November 2016 – O&Ss consider proposals and public consultation where required;
- January 2017 – Cabinet agree proposals for implementation informed by O&S recommendations and draft budget referred to Corporate O&S; and
- February 2017 – Cabinet and Council budget setting.

3.9 At this stage, the £7.492m budget gap for 2017/18, set out in paragraph 2.2, has been reduced to circa £0.9m though this rises to £1.3m when the contribution to increase the general fund balance is added. This assumes:

3.9.1 A 3.99% council tax increase; and

3.9.2 No further investment in other services, including investment in Environmental Services.

3.10 Officers continue to work towards closing the remaining balance and identifying additional funds for further investment in services.

4 Children's Services

4.1 The biggest impact on Children's Services will come from the review carried out by iMPower and the recommendations from that review currently being implemented.

4.2 iMPower was commissioned by the Council to review the provision of children's social care in terms of demand and costs. The department was experiencing high rates of referrals, children with a child protection plans, and children in care with associated increases in costs. Over three months from May 2016, the team undertook a detailed analysis of the service to identify

areas of opportunity for managing demand more effectively and then develop an implementation programme.

4.3 In the initial phase, the review identified opportunities to:

- improve productivity in the system;
- reduce needs of children before they reach social care; and
- reduce costs in social care.

4.4 The review identified that the children’s social care system is suffering from a high level of demand, a significant proportion of which is avoidable. This leads to:

- too many unnecessary assessments which lead to no further action,
- high levels of spending on placements (with too many out of authority independent foster carers),
- too many agency staff to cover higher levels of work (assessments and caseloads), and ultimately,
- too many children in care when, with more targeted and effective early intervention, family breakdown could have been prevented.

4.5 To tackle these challenges, a programme of change is required. The review grouped this work into five projects to reduce avoidable demand and costs across the children’s social care system:

Opportunity area	Description	Impact on costs
1 Getting partners to step up	Ensure the right demand is entering the system by working with partners	Reduce demand to the front door, remove unnecessary assessments
2 Making prevention work	Develop the prevention and early intervention offer to prevent higher levels of need in the future and enable safe step down of care to the community	Reduce demand for statutory services, fewer children needing to be looked after
3 Social work where it is needed	Enable more active interventions to reduce the level of need in the system and enable step down of care	Reduce assessments and escalation to social care
4 Creating a sustainable workforce	Reduce the proportion of agency staff	Reduce spend on induction and on-going costs for Agency staff

Opportunity area	Description	Impact on costs
5 Thurrock foster carers for Thurrock children	Increase the ratio of in house foster care provision to reduce placement costs	Reduce spend on IFA placements, spot purchasing, social worker travel

4.6 To tackle these challenges, a programme of change is required. Following the analysis iMPower were commissioned to project manage implementation of a number of project strands to: manage demand; increase the number of in-house foster carers; and reduce the level of agency staff. As the programme is designed to transform the social work operating model and change the behaviour of partner agencies, it is anticipated that savings will not be realised until year three (2019 /20) of the programme, although quick wins will start to dampen demand in the first year of implementation.

4.7 The MTFS currently assumes £3.5m per annum for demand led growth. Whilst not reducing demand the review should lead to a stabilisation of costs thus reducing the need for the full provision. The working assumption at this time is to reduce the £3.5m to £1.5m covering both adults' and children's social care.

4.8 Other considerations

4.8.1 Previously Agreed Savings – appendix one sets out savings that were agreed during 2014/15 for delivery within the period of the MTFS. Savings for Children's Services include £232k from "Reduce and realign youth provision across Thurrock and related service through internal reorganisation and developing the services as a mutual/ outsourced".

4.8.2 There are a number of cross cutting savings targeted with examples including the reduction of the council wide spend on agency staff, consultants and overtime. The impact of these targeted reductions on services is currently being evaluated.

5. **Reasons for Recommendation**

5.1 The Council has a statutory requirement to set a balanced budget annually and to review its adequacy of reserves. The report outlines the budget gap over the next three years as per the MTFS and the approach and timetable to manage the position.

6. **Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

6.1 The budget planning governance structure includes involvement and consultation with Officers, Portfolio Holders and Members. The timetable allocates October - December for Overview and Scrutiny committees to consider proposals and public consultation where required. The process also

includes the Council Spending Review Panel, made up of cross-party Group Leaders and Deputies who will meet regularly during the budget planning period and ahead of key decision points.

7. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 7.1 The implementation of previous savings proposals has already reduced service delivery levels and our ability to meet statutory requirements, impacting on the community and staff. There is a risk that some agreed savings may result in increased demand for more costly interventions if needs escalate particularly in social care. The potential impact on the Council's ability to safeguard children and adults will be kept carefully under review and mitigating actions taken where required.
- 7.2 The scale of future budget reductions as set out in this report are such that work is underway to follow a transformational approach to tackle the challenge.

8. Implications

8.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Carl Tomlinson**
Finance Manager

The financial implications are set out in the body of this report.

Council officers have a legal responsibility to ensure that the Council can contain spend within its available resources. Regular budget monitoring reports will continue to come to Cabinet and be considered by the Directors Board and management teams in order to maintain effective controls on expenditure during this period of enhanced risk. Austerity measures in place are continually reinforced across the Council in order to reduce ancillary spend and to ensure that everyone is aware of the importance and value of every pound of the taxpayers money that is spent by the Council.

8.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Deputy Head of Law & Governance

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

There are statutory requirements of the Council's Section 151 Officer in relation to setting a balanced budget. The Local Government Finance Act 1988 (Section 114) prescribes that the responsible financial officer "must make a report if he considers that a decision has been made or is about to be made involving expenditure which is unlawful or which, if pursued to its

conclusion, would be unlawful and likely to cause a loss or deficiency to the authority". This includes an unbalanced budget.

8.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development and Equalities

There are no specific diversity and equalities implications as part of this report.

A comprehensive Community and Equality Impact Assessment (CEIA) will be completed for any specific savings proposals developed to address future savings requirements and informed by consultation outcomes to feed into final decision making. The cumulative impact will also be closely monitored and reported to Members.

8.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Any other significant implications will be identified in any individual savings proposal business case to inform the consultation process where applicable and final decision making.

9. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

10. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – 2017/18 Savings Tracker
- Appendix 2 – Council Spending Review Governance Structure
- Appendix 3 – Service Review Timetable

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