

Notice of Meeting

Executive

Councillor Bettison OBE (Chair),
Councillor Dr Barnard (Vice-Chair),
Councillors D Birch, Brunel-Walker, Harrison, Mrs Hayes MBE,
Heydon and Turrell

Tuesday 18 October 2022, 5.00 - 7.00 pm
Council Chamber - Time Square, Market Street, Bracknell, RG12 1JD



Agenda

All councillors at this meeting have adopted the Mayor's Charter which fosters constructive and respectful debate.

Item	Description	Page
1.	Apologies	
2.	Declarations of Interest	
	<p>Members are asked to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary or Affected Interests in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.</p> <p>Any Member with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in a matter should withdraw from the meeting when the matter is under consideration and should notify the Democratic Services Officer in attendance that they are withdrawing as they have such an interest. If the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest is not entered on the register of Members interests the Monitoring Officer must be notified of the interest within 28 days.</p> <p>Any Member with an Affected Interest in a matter must disclose the interest to the meeting. There is no requirement to withdraw from the meeting when the interest is only an affected interest, but the Monitoring Officer should be notified of the interest, if not previously notified of it, within 28 days of the meeting.</p>	
3.	Minutes	3 - 10
	To consider and approve the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 29 September 2022.	
4.	Urgent Items of Business	
	Any other items which, pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman decides are urgent.	

Executive Key Decisions

The items listed below all relate to Key Executive decisions, unless stated otherwise below.

5.	Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Overview and Scrutiny Review	11 - 34
	To consider the recommendations of the review into Special Educational	

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	Needs and Disabilities. The review seeks to understand the response by the Council and their partners to the outcome of the SEND Ofsted inspection. Reporting: Councillor John Porter	
6.	Financial Hardship Action Plan and Household Support Fund (Phase 3) distribution	35 - 76
	To seek approval on the distribution plans for the third phase of the Household Support Fund grant, provided by the Department for Work and Pensions. To brief the Executive on the operational action plan for reducing the longer term impact of financial hardship for residents. Reporting: Grainne Siggins	
7.	Budget Update	77 - 124
	Provide the Executive with an update on the current year's predicted spending against budget and an outline of future financial prospects. Reporting: Stuart McKellar	

Sound recording, photographing, filming and use of social media is permitted. Please contact Hannah Harding, 01344 352308, hannah.harding@bracknell-forest.gov.uk, so that any special arrangements can be made.

Published: 10 October 2022

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EXECUTIVE
29 SEPTEMBER 2022
5.05 - 6.00 PM

Present:

Councillors Bettison OBE (Chair), Dr Barnard (Vice-Chair), D Birch, Brunel-Walker, Harrison, Mrs Hayes MBE and Turrell

Present Virtually:

Councillor Heydon

Also Present:

Councillor Mrs McKenzie-Boyle

35. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Brunel-Walker and Heydon indicated that they would be declaring an interest in relation to agenda item 12.

36. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Executive on 19 July 2022 together with the accompanying decision records be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

Executive Decisions

The Executive considered the reports submitted on the items listed below and the decisions taken are recorded in the decision sheets attached to these minutes and summarised below:

37. Integrated Enforcement Overview and Scrutiny Review

Councillor Mrs McKenzie-Boyle joined the Executive on behalf of Councillor Porter who had tendered his apologies, to present the Panel's findings.

RESOLVED that the Environment and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel's recommendations:

1. To introduce the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) as a new standard from January 2023:
 - To provide appropriate officers with training, ensuring they become accredited.
 - To encourage other appropriate officers to participate in becoming accredited where practical and where resource is available.
2. To introduce an allocation process where a team or officer is assigned as the lead for the duration of an enforcement case by November 2022.

3. To develop enforcement strategies encouraging greater collaboration across services and with partners, this being an ongoing process but with an update on its progress in 12 months' time, recognising that progress may be impacted by the outcomes of the Panel's upcoming review of the Council's enforcement strategies.
4. To run regular educational and awareness campaigns on enforcement policies and activities for residents, including information campaigns on the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme as it is introduced, with good enforcement being publicised and celebrated, particularly when it involves a joint working approach.

be accepted.

38. **National Drug Strategy – From Harm to Hope**

RESOLVED

- 1 That the geographical footprint of the Combatting Drugs Partnership be based on a Berkshire East Partnership due to the co-terminosity with the Integrated Care Partnership and Public Health functions.
- 2 That the appointment of Stuart Lines as the Senior Responsible Officer who will represent the Combatting Drugs Partnership and account for local delivery and performance to central government be endorsed.
- 3 That a temporary partnership post be developed to support the establishment of the Berkshire East Combatting Drugs Partnership, the development of the terms of reference, undertake a needs assessment for Berkshire East and develop a strategy on how the partnership will deliver against the priorities in the national drug strategy
- 4 That a Local Drug Strategy Delivery Partnership be established to oversee the delivery of the local drug strategy and report on progress to the Berkshire East Combatting Drugs Partnership.
- 5 That the Leader be requested to appoint the member representative to the Combatting Drugs Partnership.

39. **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Letter**

RESOLVED that the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual review letter 2022 be noted.

40. **Quarter 1 Council Plan Overview Report**

RESOLVED that the performance of the council over the period from April-June 2022 highlighted in the Council Plan Overview Report be noted.

41. **Exclusion of Public and Press**

RESOLVED that pursuant to Regulation 21 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) Regulations 2000, members of the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of items 10-13 which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information under the following category of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

- (3) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority).

Executive Decisions containing Exempt Information

The Executive considered the reports submitted on the items containing exempt information listed below and the decisions taken are recorded in the decision sheets attached to these minutes and summarised below:

42. Allocation of S106 Commuted Sum Monies (Bay House and Barn Close)

RESOLVED:

- 1 That spend of up to £500,000 to Silva Homes from the Section 106 affordable housing commuted fund be approved, to support the development of 51 additional social rented homes for households on the Council's housing register; and,
- 2 That payment YN654 (TRL) of £478,511.73 and part of payment YN717 (Christine Ingram Gardens) of £50,501 be approved to fund the proposed spend.

43. Lease of the unit in Princess Square for the Library

RESOLVED:

- 1 That the principle of relocating the library to Princess Square LSU 4, Bracknell to create a new library and cultural facility to complement the Deck scheme and facilitate future regeneration of the current library site be approved;
- 2 That the Council enters into the proposed heads of terms for a lease of this unit as set out in Appendix B of the Executive Director: Place, Planning & Regeneration's report, and delegates the completion of a lease arrangement to the Assistant Director: Property in consultation with the Executive Member for Transformation and Finance, subject to the Deck scheme being unconditionally committed to by Bracknell Regeneration Limited Partnership;
- 3 That the detailed design (from RIBA stage D) for a new library and cultural facility commence and a planning application to be funded from the Property Feasibility budget (YM378) be submitted once the heads of terms have been signed.

44. Greening Energy Use Reducing Energy Costs

RESOLVED that:

- 1 The invest to save bid of £785k, to implement a number of projects as shown in Appendix A of the Executive Director: Delivery's report, to help reduce the Council's energy costs and assist with the Council's carbon footprint with an aim to reach a target of carbon Net Zero by 2050 or earlier be approved.
- 2 That essential building repairs required to be completed prior to the energy saving works, at an approximate cost of £245k be approved, the cost of these works being funded from the 2022/23 capital planned maintenance budget

retention monies which would normally be carried forward into the next financial year.

45. **Depot (surplus land) Exclusivity period extension**

RESOLVED that the exclusivity period relating to surplus land at the central depot site initially granted by the Executive to the Bracknell Forest Cambium Partnership on 21 September 2021 be extended by a further 12 calendar months, beginning 1 October 2022.

NB: Councillors Brunel-Walker and Heydon declared affected interests being the Council's representatives on the Board of the Bracknell Forest Cambium Partnership and withdrew from the meeting.

46. **Tim Wheadon**

The Leader reminded the Executive that this was Chief Executive Tim Wheadon's last meeting before his retirement. He thanked Mr Wheadon for the guidance, support and leadership he had given the Council. He said that he had been an exemplary Chief Executive. He wished Mr Wheadon a long happy and healthy retirement and called on colleagues to give Mr Wheadon a vote of thanks.

The Executive unanimously offered Mr Wheadon its thanks.

CHAIRMAN

**Bracknell Forest Council
Record of Decision**

Work Programme Reference	I108318
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1. **TITLE:** Quarter 1 Council Plan Overview Report

2. **SERVICE AREA:** Chief Executive's Office

3. **PURPOSE OF DECISION**

To update the Executive on the progress made to deliver the council plan objectives.

4 **IS KEY DECISION** Yes

5. **DECISION MADE BY:** Executive

6. **DECISION:**

That the performance of the council over the period from April-June 2022 highlighted in the Council Plan Overview Report be noted.

7. **REASON FOR DECISION**

To brief the Executive on the council's performance, highlighting key areas, so that appropriate action can be taken if needed.

8. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

None.

9. **DOCUMENT CONSIDERED:** Report of the Chief Executive

10. **DECLARED CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** None.

Date Decision Made	Final Day of Call-in Period
29 September 2022	6 October 2022

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**Bracknell Forest Council
Record of Decision**

Work Programme Reference	I108640
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1. **TITLE:** Depot (surplus land) Exclusivity period extension

2. **SERVICE AREA:** Resources

3. **PURPOSE OF DECISION**

Recommendation to extend the exclusivity period granted to Bracknell Forest Cambium Partnership for surplus land at the Depot site

4 **IS KEY DECISION** No

5. **DECISION MADE BY:** Executive

6. **DECISION:**

The exclusivity period relating to surplus land at the central depot site initially granted by the Executive to the Bracknell Forest Cambium Partnership on 21 September 2021 be extended by a further 12 calendar months, beginning 1 October 2022.

7. **REASON FOR DECISION**

The impact of inflationary pressures and uncertainty on build costs and construction pressures have slowed the process of developing a feasible plan to bring to the Council for consideration.

These extraordinary pressures have impacted on the Joint Venture being able to reach a stage at which it is relatively confident, in the face of market cost uncertainty, to present the Council a viable and considered development plan for the site (Initial Site Development Plan). The extra time requested will allow the Joint Venture to collate all information required for the Council to be able to reach an informed decision on the development plan.

8. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

The surplus land could remain un-developed for the foreseeable future, although this would not satisfy the Council's agreed strategic objective of progressing regeneration schemes in and around Bracknell town centre.

The surplus land could be offered for open market sale from 1 October 2022 and conditional offers would likely be received. However, given current inflationary pressures on build costs and general market uncertainty, it is unlikely that maximum value from the site including additional affordable housing would be secured at this time and the council may be minded to delay placing it on the open market until the market settles down.

9. **DOCUMENT CONSIDERED:** Report of the Executive Director: Resources

10. **DECLARED CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** Councillors Brunel-Walker and Heydon declared affected interests being the

Council's representatives on the
Bracknell Forest Cambium Partnership.

Date Decision Made	Final Day of Call-in Period
29 September 2022	6 October 2022

To: Executive
18 October 2022

Overview and Scrutiny Review of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Report Councillor Mrs Birch, Chair Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present the Executive with the findings of the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel's review into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) which have been endorsed by the Overview & Scrutiny Commission, and to seek approval of the Panel's recommendations.
- 1.2 To provide the advice of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (SSO) to inform the Executive's decision whether to agree the Panel's recommendations.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the Executive considers whether to agree the Education, Skills and Growth Overview & Scrutiny Panel's recommendations as set out in the Panel report (attached as Appendix A) and paragraph 5.8 of this report, taking into account the comments of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer.**

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel concluded their findings based on the evidence considered and review that was undertaken. The review report is attached as Appendix A.
- 3.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has endorsed the review recommendations, taking into account the review report and the views of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer.
- 3.3 The comments from the relevant officer set out in paragraph 7 of this report do not indicate any concerns with the proposed recommendations.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Executive could decide:
 - to agree the recommendations as set out in the Panel's report
 - to agree the recommendations in part
 - to ask for further work to be undertaken recognising that this would delay the Panel's next piece of work
 - to note the Panel report

5 Supporting Information from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer

- 5.1 It is the role of the SSO to advise the Council on any issues or concerns that may arise about the operation of the scrutiny function and the SSO may on occasion be required to make a determination about what the law says and how this should be

applied to any particular situation. In carrying out this statutory role, there is a need to have a nuanced and meaningful understanding of the scrutiny function in order to accurately make judgments about its operation when disagreements or other issues arise.

- 5.2 The SSO is responsible for ensuring that the scrutiny function is adequately resourced and that service departments and partners are contributing sufficiently to reviews to ensure that they are effective.
- 5.3 The SSO is also responsible for providing advice to the Commission and Executive on whether the recommendations within review reports are robust, taking account of resource, legal, climate change, equalities, health and wellbeing and strategic risk implications.
- 5.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission commissioned the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel to carry out a review into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities as part of the overview and scrutiny four-year work programme, which has been developed to track themes within the new Council Plan.
- 5.5 In support of this review, a broad range of witnesses gave evidence putting the Panel in a good position to use this intelligence to frame the review and produce insightful recommendations. Panel members also conducted 'secret shopper' exercises, visited several educational establishments in the borough and spoke with representatives from another local authority.
- 5.6 The Panel was supported by Louise Connelly, Governance and Scrutiny Officer who supported the Panel to draw up the scope of the review; prepare an evidence pack of relevant information; facilitate several Panel sessions to interview a range of contributors and visit early years' settings, schools and post-16 settings; draw out findings from the Panel's investigation, and to prepare a review report. This involved in the region of 800 hours of scrutiny officer time and 22 hours of Panel meetings.
- 5.7 The Commission considered the Panel's recommendations on 6 October and endorsed them for referral to the Executive. The reasons for making these recommendations are set out in the Panel report.
- 5.8 The recommendations are:
 - 1) **Ensure Bracknell Forest Council SEND team deliver on their statutory responsibilities within agreed WSOA timescales. Embed culture change with health teams and the SEND team so better communication ensures we move away from crisis management and put the children and young people first.**
 - 2) **The departmental structure of the SEND team should be reviewed to ensure accountability at all levels and monitoring of outputs and outcomes to meet statutory requirements is in place and consistent.**
 - 3) **Strengthen and recognise voice of CYP and parents / carers in improving SEND service provision. Use co-production to form strategies, and forward planning.**
 - 4) **Clarify what financial support is available to young people, parents/carers, schools, and provider and ensure it is well publicised.**
 - 5) **Review the functionality of the Local Offer and information on the website to ensure it is presented clearly and includes more 'visual' aids so there is a clear pathway for parents and carers to access SEND help and advice.**

- 6) **Ensure all partners complete EHCP assessments within statutory timescales. Consider commissioning independent therapists if not possible due to shortage in current service provider.**
- 7) **Review current training offered to parents/carers of children and young people with SEND and training for professionals, including staff in early years' settings.**
- 8) **Review consistency of offer of a Carers Assessment to parents/carers/siblings. Ensure Carers Assessments are offered at the earliest opportunity and that support is offered according to eligibility criteria.**
- 9) **Review availability of Personal Budgets to support EHCPs with a view to all statutory partners supporting requests in the future.**
- 10) **Explore the financial impact on the service of appointing a key worker to the family to help with crisis management i.e. admission to hospital and discharge.**
- 11) **Explore options to train therapists locally including liaising with Universities and schools to train staff locally in Bracknell schools. To promote 'Grow Your Own' opportunities in health and SEND team.**
- 12) **Review SEND provision in the borough to ensure it is sufficient and effective at addressing the needs of children and young people with special needs and disabilities in Bracknell. This includes annual reviews of Specialist Resource Provision located in schools, the offer in post 16 education and bespoke provision for children and young people with SEND.**
- 13) **Explore option of an IT software platform which allows the Council and Frimley CCG to share information with children, young people, and parents/carers safely and be time sensitive. Also, carry out a feasibility study for a secure portal to share EHCP information with neighbouring Councils.**

5.8 In endorsing the Panel's recommendations the Commission also took account of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer's views. In summary, these were that this review activity had adequate resources and that the service departments contributed effectively to the review. The bulk of review activity took place between January and May 2022 and the review was slightly delayed due to an Ofsted Inspection taking place as the review was due to begin so it was split into two parts. The comments from the relevant officers and partners set out below do not indicate any concerns with the proposed recommendations.

6 Commentary from Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chair, Councillor Mrs Gill Birch

- 6.1 There were several reasons we decided to carry out this review which forms part of our revised¹ four-year programme of scrutiny activity. Firstly, the national picture was that the number of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) increased to 1.37 million in 2020. Secondly, during the Covid-19 pandemic the attainment gap between SEND and average attaining pupils increased by over 20% across all age groups, nationally. Locally, data indicated timescales for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) was not being met.
- 6.2 We undertook a lot of activity as part of this review and fed back our findings to decision makers along the way to ensure swift action to address any issues we found. However, some issues require longer timescales and significant investment.

¹ Bracknell Forest Council Overview & Scrutiny Commission revised its four year plan of scrutiny activity in November 2020.

6.3 Our recommendations stated above are aimed at addressing the issues we uncovered during this review in order to strengthen services and support provided for children, young people and their families in the borough in the future.

6.4 I particularly found this review emotional hearing first-hand how parents and carers were dealing with the challenges of their children with special needs and how they struggled to cope.

7 Response from Executive Director: People, Grainne Siggins

7.1 *The development of the written statement of action was a comprehensive, coproduced piece of work exploring the key actions needed to improve Special Educational Needs and Disability Service in Bracknell Forest. It is vitally important that we aspire to achieve the high standards of support and provision for all of our families and that the actions within the written statement of action aim to deliver that for children and young people with SEN and their families. I welcome the scrutiny review and note the findings.*

7.2 Response from Tracey Faraday-Drake, Executive Director and Senior Responsible Officer for Children and Young People, Learning Disabilities and Autism, NHS Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group

7.3 In response to Recommendation 6) In order to ensure that we have sustainability and consistency across health services it remains our preference to recruit into permanent job vacancies within the Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust Integrated Therapies Team and we have provided additional financial investment to strengthen and support this. We fully recognise this is not without its challenges as therapeutic services are nationally recognised as being difficult to recruit into, with particular emphasis on Occupational Therapists. We are actively working to reduce the current occupational therapy wait times, ensure advice and input to EHCNA's is within statutory timescales and explore the support offered to those who are waiting for Occupational Therapy. In order to achieve all of these key areas we are giving careful consideration to any wider elements of this plan which could potentially be suitably supported by the independent sector. We have made enquiries with health colleagues in Croydon to better understand the initiative referenced in this recommendation.

7.4 In response to Recommendation 11) This piece of work is underway as part of the NHS Long Term Plan: Children and young people with autism and/or a learning disability with the most complex level of need will have a key worker by 2024, implementing the recommendation made by Dame Christine Lenehan in 'These are our children'. Initially Keyworker support will be provided to children and young people who are in an inpatient setting (due to their mental health, autism and/or a learning disability) and also those considered at risk of going into an inpatient setting (due to their mental health, autism and/or a learning disability). Keyworker support will then also be extended to the most vulnerable children and young people with autism and/or a learning disability, this will include children and young people in care (LAC/CIC), children and young people who have been adopted and children and young people in transition between services.

8 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 8.1 The relevant legal issues are comprehensively addressed within the report. The report is focussed on the statutory responsibilities and duties of the local authority Education Department for SEND in their area.

Financial Advice

- 8.2 A number of the recommendations require further work to establish the extent of any financial implications. Where relevant, these will need to be considered as part of the normal budget setting process.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.3 The review scope, activities and recommendations were all considered in the initial equalities screening attached at Appendix B.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 8.4 Adopting the recommendations contained in this report will enhance the support and service provision to children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers and show residents the importance Bracknell Forest Council and Frimley CCG have placed on ensuring SEND provision in the borough meets statutory obligations but, in addition, goes beyond that and provides an excellent service. It should be noted 11 out of the 12 recommendations align with the Written Statement of Action which Bracknell Forest Council and Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) were required to complete following the Ofsted SEND Inspection earlier this year. However, some of the timelines differ as these recommendations are ambitious. In addition, recommendation 7, regarding a new IT system will have a significant cost implication to the Council and CCG, so this will need to be explored to ensure finances are not being diverted away from other priority areas.

Climate Change Implications

- 8.5 The recommendations in Section 2 and 5 above are expected to have no impact on emissions of CO2 because there is no suggested increase in activity or travel that would generate a change.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

- 8.6 Giving all children the best start in life and support emotional and physical health from birth to adulthood is one of the Council's priorities in its recently updated Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The recommendations support Bracknell Forest being one of the healthiest places to live. Residents will therefore experience better health, both physical and mental.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

Kevin Gibbs, Statutory Scrutiny Officer - 01344 355621
kevin.gibbs@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Louise Connelly, Governance & Scrutiny Officer – 01344 354047
louise.connelly@bracknell-forest.gv.uk

To: **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**
6 October 2022

Overview and Scrutiny Review of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
Statutory Scrutiny Officer

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel's report to the Commission following the Panel's review into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- 1.2 To provide the advice of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (SSO) to inform the Commission's decision whether to endorse the Panel's recommendations to the Executive.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission endorse the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel's recommendations to the Executive, as set out in the Panel report (attached as Appendix A) and paragraph 5.5 of this report, taking into account the comments of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer.**

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 It is the role of the SSO to advise the Council on any issues or concerns that may arise about the operation of the scrutiny function and the SSO may on occasion be required to make a determination about what the law says and how this should be applied to any particular situation. In carrying out this statutory role, there is a need to have a nuanced and meaningful understanding of the scrutiny function in order to accurately make judgments about its operation when disagreements or other issues arise.
- 3.2 The SSO is responsible for ensuring that the scrutiny function is adequately resourced and that service departments and partners are contributing sufficiently to reviews to ensure that they are effective.
- 3.3 The SSO is also responsible for providing advice to the Commission on whether the recommendations within review reports are robust, taking account of resource, legal, climate change, equalities, health and wellbeing and strategic risk implications.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Commission could decide:
- to endorse the recommendations to the Executive (and others) as set out in the Panel's report
 - to endorse the recommendations in part
 - to ask for further work to be undertaken before the report is submitted to the Executive recognising that this would delay the Panel's next piece of work

- to note the Panel report and not make any recommendations to the Executive (or others)

5 Supporting Information from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission commissioned the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel to carry out a review into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities as part of the overview and scrutiny four-year work programme, which has been developed to track themes within the new Council Plan.
- 5.2 In support of this review a broad range of witnesses gave evidence putting the Panel in a good position to use this intelligence to frame the review and produce insightful recommendations.
- 5.3 The Panel was supported by Louise Connelly, Governance and Scrutiny Officer who supported the Panel to draw up the scope of the review; prepare an evidence pack of relevant information; facilitate several Panel sessions to interview a range of contributors and visit early years' settings, schools and post-16 settings; draw out findings from the Panel's investigation, and to prepare a review report. This involved in the region of 800 hours of scrutiny officer time and 22 hours of Panel meetings.
- 5.4 In summary it is the Statutory Scrutiny Officer's view that this review activity had adequate resources and that service departments contributed effectively to the review. The bulk of review activity took place between January 2022 and May 2022. The start of the review was delayed due to the SEND Ofsted Inspection taking place as the review was due to begin so it was split into two parts. The comments from the relevant officers and partners set out below do not indicate any concerns with the proposed recommendations. Issues regarding finances are addressed below.
- 5.5 The recommendations are:
- i. Ensure Bracknell Forest Council SEND team deliver on their statutory responsibilities within agreed WSOA timescales. Embed culture change with health teams and the SEND team so better communication ensures we move away from crisis management and put the children and young people first.
 - ii. The departmental structure of the SEND team should be reviewed to ensure accountability at all levels and monitoring of outputs and outcomes to meet statutory requirements is in place and consistent.
 - iii. Strengthen and recognise voice of CYP and parents / carers in improving SEND service provision. Use co-production to form strategies, and forward planning.
 - iv. Clarify what financial support is available to young people, parents/carers, schools, and provider and ensure it is well publicised.
 - v. Review the functionality of the Local Offer and information on the website to ensure it is presented clearly and includes more 'visual' aids so there is a clear pathway for parents and carers to access SEND help and advice.
 - vi. Ensure all partners complete EHCP assessments within statutory timescales. Consider commissioning independent therapists if not possible due to shortage in current service provider.
 - vii. Review current training offered to parents/carers of children and young people with SEND and training for professionals, including staff in early years' settings.
 - viii. Review consistency of offer of a Carers Assessment to parents/carers/siblings. Ensure Carers Assessments are offered at the earliest opportunity and that support is offered according to eligibility criteria.

- ix. Review availability of Personal Budgets to support EHCPs with a view to all statutory partners supporting requests in the future.
- x. Explore the financial impact on the service of appointing a key worker to the family to help with crisis management i.e. admission to hospital and discharge.
- xi. Explore options to train therapists locally including liaising with Universities and schools to train staff locally in Bracknell schools. To promote 'Grow Your Own' opportunities in health and SEND team.
- xii. Review SEND provision in the borough to ensure it is sufficient and effective at addressing the needs of children and young people with special needs and disabilities in Bracknell. This includes annual reviews of Specialist Resource Provision located in schools, the offer in post 16 education and bespoke provision for children and young people with SEND.
- xiii. Explore option of an IT software platform which allows the Council and Frimley CCG to share information with children, young people, and parents/carers safely and be time sensitive. Also, carry out a feasibility study for a secure portal to share EHCP information with neighbouring Councils.

6 Commentary from Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chair, Councillor Mrs Gill Birch

- 6.1 There were several reasons we decided to carry out this review which forms part of our revised¹ four-year programme of scrutiny activity. Firstly, the national picture was that the number of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) increased to 1.37 million in 2020. Secondly, during the Covid-19 pandemic the attainment gap between SEND and average attaining pupils increased by over 20% across all age groups, nationally. Locally, data indicated timescales for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) was not being met.
- 6.2 We undertook a lot of activity as part of this review, including visiting and fed back our findings to decision makers along the way to ensure swift action to address any issues we found. However, some issues require longer timescales and significant investment.
- 6.3 Our recommendations stated above are aimed at addressing the issues we uncovered during this review in order to strengthen services and support provided for children, young people and their families in the borough in the future.
- 6.4 I particularly found this review emotional hearing first-hand how parents and carers were dealing with the challenges of their children with special needs and how they struggled to cope.

7 Response from Executive Director: People, Bracknell Forest Council, Grainne Siggins and

- 7.1 *The development of the written statement of action was a comprehensive, coproduced piece of work exploring the key actions needed to improve Special Educational Needs and Disability Service in Bracknell Forest. It is vitally important that we aspire to achieve the high standards of support and provision for all of our families and that the actions within the written statement of action aim to deliver that for children and young people with SEN and their families. I welcome the scrutiny review and note the findings.*

¹ Bracknell Forest Council Overview & Scrutiny Commission revised its four year plan of scrutiny activity in November 2020.

- 7.2 **Response from Tracey Faraday-Drake, Executive Director and Senior Responsible Officer for Children and Young People, Learning Disabilities and Autism, NHS Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group**
- 7.3 *In response to Recommendation 6) In order to ensure that we have sustainability and consistency across health services it remains our preference to recruit into permanent job vacancies within the Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust Integrated Therapies Team and we have provided additional financial investment to strengthen and support this. We fully recognise this is not without its challenges as therapeutic services are nationally recognised as being difficult to recruit into, with particular emphasis on Occupational Therapists. We are actively working to reduce the current occupational therapy wait times, ensure advice and input to EHCNA's is within statutory timescales and explore the support offered to those who are waiting for Occupational Therapy. In order to achieve all of these key areas we are giving careful consideration to any wider elements of this plan which could potentially be suitably supported by the independent sector. We have made enquiries with health colleagues in Croydon to better understand the initiative referenced in this recommendation.*
- 7.4 *In response to Recommendation 11) This piece of work is underway as part of the NHS Long Term Plan: Children and young people with autism and/or a learning disability with the most complex level of need will have a key worker by 2024, implementing the recommendation made by Dame Christine Lenehan in 'These are our children'. Initially Keyworker support will be provided to children and young people who are in an inpatient setting (due to their mental health, autism and/or a learning disability) and also those considered at risk of going into an inpatient setting (due to their mental health, autism and/or a learning disability). Keyworker support will then also be extended to the most vulnerable children and young people with autism and/or a learning disability, this will include children and young people in care (LAC/CIC), children and young people who have been adopted and children and young people in transition between services.*

8 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 8.1 The relevant legal issues are comprehensively addressed within the report. The report is focussed on the statutory responsibilities and duties of the local authority Education Department for SEND in their area.

Financial Advice

- 8.2 A number of the recommendations require further work to establish the extent of any financial implications. Where relevant, these will need to be considered as part of the normal budget setting process.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.3 The review scope, activities and recommendations were all considered in the initial equalities screening attached at Appendix B.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 8.4 Adopting the recommendations contained in this report will enhance the support and service provision to children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers and show residents the importance Bracknell Forest Council and Frimley CCG have placed on ensuring SEND provision in the borough meets statutory obligations but, in

addition, goes beyond that and provides an excellent service. It should be noted 10 out of the 13 recommendations align with the Written Statement of Action which Bracknell Forest Council and Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) were required to complete following the Ofsted SEND Inspection earlier this year. However, some of the timelines differ as these recommendations are ambitious. In addition, recommendation 13 regarding a new IT system will have a significant cost implication to the Council and CCG, so this will need to be explored to ensure finances are not being diverted away from other priority areas.

Climate Change Implications

- 8.5 The recommendations in Section 2 and 5 above are expected to have no impact on emissions of CO2 because there is no suggested increase in activity or travel that would generate a change.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

- 8.6 Giving all children the best start in life and support emotional and physical health from birth to adulthood is one of the Council's priorities in its recently updated Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The recommendations support Bracknell Forest being one of the healthiest places to live. Residents will therefore experience better health, both physical and mental.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

Kevin Gibbs, Statutory Scrutiny Officer - 01344 355621
kevin.gibbs@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Louise Connelly, Governance & Scrutiny Officer - 01344 354047
louise.connelly@bracknell-forest.gv.uk

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Overview and Scrutiny Panel Report

REVIEW TITLE	O&S PANEL	DATE
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities	Education, Skills and Growth	6 October 2022

“There were several reasons we decided to carry out this review which forms part of our revised¹ four-year programme of scrutiny activity. Firstly, the national picture was that the number of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) increased to 1.37 million in 2020. Secondly, during the Covid-19 pandemic the attainment gap between SEND and average attaining pupils increased by over 20% across all age groups, nationally. Locally, data indicated timescales for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were not being met. This data prompted a necessity to carry out this review as soon as possible but we were delayed due to Bracknell Forest being inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission. When we did commence our activities, we spoke to parents/carers and visited several schools, early years and post-16 settings. We fed back our findings to decision makers along the way to ensure swift action to address any issues we found. However, some issues require longer timescales and significant investment. Our recommendations below are aimed at addressing those issues in order to strengthen services and support provided for children, young people and their families in the borough in the future.”



Councillor Mrs Gill Birch,
Chair: Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Recommendations

1	Ensure Bracknell Forest Council SEND team deliver on their statutory responsibilities within agreed WSOA timescales. Embed culture change with health teams and the SEND team so better communication ensures we move away from crisis management and put the children and young people first.	Short term = six months
2	The departmental structure of the SEND team should be reviewed to ensure accountability at all levels and monitoring of outputs and outcomes to meet statutory requirements is in place and consistent.	
3	Strengthen and recognise voice of CYP and parents/carers in improving SEND service provision. Use co-production to form strategies and forward planning.	
4	Clarify what financial support is available to young people, parents/carers, schools, and providers and ensure it is well publicised.	
5	Review the functionality of the Local Offer and information on the website to ensure it is presented clearly and includes more 'visual' aids so there is a clear pathway for parents and carers to access SEND advice and services.	

¹ Bracknell Forest Council Overview & Scrutiny Commission revised its four year plan of scrutiny activity in November 2020.

6	Ensure all partners complete EHCP assessments within statutory timescales. Consider commissioning independent therapists if not possible due to shortage in current service provider.	Medium term = 18 months
7	Review current training offered to parents/carers of children and young people with SEND and training for all professionals, including staff in early years settings.	
8	Review consistency of offering a Carers Assessment to parents/carers/siblings. Ensure Carers Assessments are offered at the earliest opportunity and that support is offered according to eligibility criteria.	
9	Review availability of Personal Budgets to support EHCPs with a view to all statutory partners supporting requests in the future.	Long term = three years
10	Explore the financial impact on the service of appointing a key worker to the family to help with crisis management i.e. admission to hospital and discharge.	
11	Explore options to train therapists locally including liaising with Universities and schools to train staff locally in Bracknell schools. To promote 'Grow Your Own' opportunities in health and SEND team.	
12	Review SEND provision in the borough to ensure it is sufficient and effective at addressing the needs of children and young people with special needs and disabilities in Bracknell. This includes annual reviews of Specialist Resource Provision located in schools, the offer in post 16 education and bespoke provision for children and young people with SEND.	
13	Explore option of an IT software platform which allows the Council and Frimley CCG to share information with children, young people and parents/carers safely and be time sensitive. Also, carry out a feasibility study for a secure portal to share EHCP information with neighbouring Councils.	

Approach

The Panel met to agree the scope of the review in October 2021 but, due to Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) announcing an imminent joint SEND inspection in Bracknell Forest it was agreed the scope would be revised and split into two parts in order not to over burden schools and organisations involved.



Scrutinise background documents including strategies and data available; review good practice nationally; carry out 'secret shopper' exercise on the Local Offer.



Carry out interviews with children, young people, parents/carers; lead officers in partner organisations; schools; early years settings; post-16 settings and other local authorities. Review Bracknell Forest's Written Statement of Action (WSOA).



Good practice

During the review Panel members identified the following areas of good practice:

- ✔ Following the lockdowns, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Bracknell Forest Council Child Development Centre allocated a key worker to each pre-school. Staff in those settings we visited said this had helped identify and provide support more quickly to children they identified as potentially having SEND.
- ✔ Dedicated teaching and learning posts have been created in the SEND team to support schools and this was helping teachers to implement Quality First Teaching in all schools.
- ✔ The locality 'cluster' structure for schools has recently been implemented across the borough which should help schools in each cluster to support each other.
- ✔ Co-production with parent/carer forum representatives was apparent in helping to write the strategic future vision for the borough, including the Written Statement of Action.
- ✔ SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (SEND IASS) were highly regarded by everyone interviewed, including young people, parents/carers, schools, Post 16, and early years' staff. Parents/carers said they appreciated SEND IASS staff's empathy skills and that they listened to children and communicated their needs clearly to others.
- ✔ Three members of Croydon Borough Council's SEND team had built a new team to liaise between the Local Authority and schools. Evidence showed schools felt listened to by the local authority and education staff they felt they were supporting children/young people better, had better access to necessary resources, that the number of EHCPs had been reduced and the strategy had resulted in significant savings for the local authority.
- ✔ The Written Statement of Action was accepted by Ofsted without any changes.
- ✔ Health Visitors were beginning to visit nurseries again, which had ceased during the pandemic, and nursery staff said it helped because they knew who to contact.
- ✔ It was recognised NHS Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group were looking at a key worker project to prevent crisis and hospital admissions. Parents said they felt this would help them navigate crisis admissions but wanted it extended so all parents had a health key worker.
- ✔ A local school had 'grown their own' therapists to deal with the national shortage of availability of Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists, which young people in the school said provided them with vital support.



Review findings

During this review Panel members found evidence which largely corroborated Ofsted's judgment that Bracknell Forest Council and Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group, who provide statutory support and services to children, young people with SEND and their families, required a Written Statement of Action to help improve. During this review Panel members noted:

The SEND department at Bracknell Forest Council was being reorganised but there were still several vacancies which was impacting on the service children, young people and their families received. **(Recommendation 2) (WSOA ref: 2.1.4)**



There was evidence of productive partnerships in the past between external agencies, but this needed rebuilding after the pandemic. A key issue was communication and poor response times for getting back to people. **(Recommendation 1) (WSOA ref: 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3)**

Co-production was apparent in the Written Statement of Action but there needed to be more opportunities for 'hard to reach' parents/carers' views to be incorporated into shaping the strategic vision. **(Recommendation 1) (WSOA ref: 2.1.3, 2.3.1, 3.1.3)**



The culture of the SEND team was highlighted as an issue by parents/carers, school, Post-16 and early years' staff. In particular a lack of empathy for the needs of the child/young person with SEND but also for the staff supporting the child. **(Recommendation 1) (WSOA ref: 2.1.4)**

Training was raised as an issue by parents/carers as well as school, Post-16 and early years' staff. Parents/carers wanted training that helped them support their child better rather than generic parenting courses. Specifically, school/college/early years' staff said they wanted courses that would help identify needs and give them techniques to better support children/young people. **(Recommendation 7) (WSOA ref: 3.1.4, 6.1.5)**



Parents/carers and school staff said they wanted consistency of key worker assigned to them and to be informed immediately when their key worker changed. **(Recommendation 1 & 2) (WSOA ref: 2.1.4)**

Few children, young people, parents/carers were aware of the Local Offer and, those that were, said they rarely used it. One parent who did use it said the functionality should be improved as filtering when looking for a suitable school did not work properly. **(Recommendation 5) (WSOA ref: 9.1.5, 9.1.6)**



EHCPs were not reviewed in a timely manner although it was recognised there had been recent improvements in timescales. **(Recommendations 1, 2, 6) (WSOA ref: 2.1.2)**

Parents/carers said they wanted to access different types of therapy for children, such as art classes, but were not able to as they didn't have control of the finances. Only one child had a Personal Budget to date. **(Recommendations 3, 4, 6, 9 & 11) (WSOA ref: 5.1.7)**



Parents/carers said they felt they had to say negative, not positive, things about their child when completing forms/assessments. Also, where strengths were identified, they were not feeding into their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to help their child continue or use that strength to progress. **(Recommendation 1, 3, & 7) (WSOA ref: 2.1.2, 2.1.3)**

It was unclear what the processes were for monitoring budgets by senior staff. **(Recommendation 2) (WSOA ref: 6.1.1)**



All of the parents/carers interviewed said they were not offered a Carers Assessment. One parent had pushed for a Carers Assessment but was informed they would not qualify for any support. **(Recommendation 8)**

Parents/carers said they would like someone to hold their hand at the beginning of their journey, similar to the Kickstart programme, a 'peer mentoring programme'. **(Recommendation 1, 3, 8 & 10) (WSOA ref: 2.1.3)**



Feedback from parents/carers and schools was that EHCPs needed to be more deliverable as they felt the current Panel set up did not allow for those directly involved with the child to advocate for them at those meetings. **(Recommendation 2 & 3) (WSOA ref: 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4)**

Masking signs of autism, especially girls, was thought to be on the increase and there was not enough training in this area. **(Recommendation 7) (WSOA ref: 3.1.4, 6.1.5)**

There was a significant lack of access to trained therapists, especially Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists. **(Recommendations 6 & 11) (WSOA ref: 5.1.7)**



Specialist, local provision needed to be reviewed as currently provision could not cater for all children/young people with SEND in the borough. **(Recommendation 12) (WSOA ref: 4.1)**

There were some issues with data sharing between the Local Authority, Frimley CCG and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust. **(Recommendation 1 & 13) (WSOA ref: 6.1.1)**



Financial considerations

There are likely to be financial considerations attached to staff changes and alternative provision options although most are included in the Written Statement of Action. However, the recommendation regarding reviewing Carers Assessments and investing in new IT software to create a 'one stop shop' are not included in the Written Statement of Action currently. A feasibility study will be required to explore financial implications prior to commissioning new IT software.

“I am always proud of how the Borough works with partners for it is one of our strengths, and I feel this is a good example of partnership working to enable us all to support our most vulnerable children and young people.

My thanks go to all those who contributed, particularly my Vice Chair Councillor Michael Brossard, all the Councillors who took part, officers, and our health colleagues, to improve the services on offer to children and young people with special needs. The participants are listed below, and my grateful thanks goes to all of them. This report depends on good support, and I particularly thank Louise Connelly for all her help.

I look forward to reviewing the recommendations in early 2023.”

Councillor Mrs Gill Birch,
Chair: Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Review Panel

Councillor Allen	Councillor Ms Gaw
Councillor Mrs Birch (Chair)	Councillor Gbadebo
Councillor Bhandari	Councillor Mrs Gibson
Councillor Brossard (Vice Chair)	Councillor Hamilton
Councillor Brown	Councillor Ms Hayes
Councillor Temperton	Councillor Skinner

Contributors to the review

Grainne Siggins	Executive Director: People, Bracknell Forest Council
Cheryl Eyre	Assistant Director: Learning, Bracknell Forest Council
Fiona Slevin-Brown	Managing Director: NHS Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group
Samina Hussain	Senior Transformation Lead, Children and Young People, Bracknell Forest, NHS Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group
Tracey Faraday-Drake	Executive Place Managing Director (Slough) East Berkshire Clinical Commissioning Group
Julian Emms	Chief Executive of Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust
Karen Cridland	Director of Children's, Young People and Families Service, Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust

Councillor Dr Barnard	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning, Bracknell Forest Council
Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities	Many children and young people with SEND were interviewed during visits to educational establishments.
Parents/carers	Parents/carers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
Schools/Early Years settings/Post-16 settings/Specialist provision	10 educational establishments around the borough allowed Panel members to visit during the course of this review and interviews were held with Head Teachers, Deputy Head Teachers and Sencos.
Croydon Borough Council representatives	Mark Southworth, Locality SEND support, Consultant Lead, Croydon Borough Council Sonal Desai, Area SEND Lead, Croydon Borough Council Keran Currie, Area SEND lead, Croydon Borough Council
Louise Connelly	Governance and Scrutiny Officer, Bracknell Forest Council

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Initial Equalities Screening Record Form

Date of Screening: December 2021	Directorate: Delivery	Section: Democracy and Governance	
1. Activity to be assessed	Overview and Scrutiny Panel for Education, Skills and Growth review into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This review will consult include desk top based research into data provided by the local authority and health partners, secret shopper exercise, interviewing parents/carers, children and young people with SEND, representatives from educational establishments in the borough, the local authority, health representatives and other local authorities.		
2. What is the activity?	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy/strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Function/procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Service <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational change		
3. Is it a new or existing activity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New		
4. Officer responsible for the screening	Louise Connelly, Governance & Scrutiny Officer		
5. Who are the members of the screening team?	Louise Connelly, Paris O'Keefe, Cllr Mrs Gill Birch, Cllr Michael Brossard		
6. What is the purpose of the activity?	The purpose of the activity is to determine whether organisations supporting and providing services to children and young people with SEND in Bracknell Forest are meeting their statutory obligations.		
7. Who is the activity designed to benefit/target?	Children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers.		
Protected Characteristics	Please tick yes or no	Is there an impact?	What evidence do you have to support this?
8. Disability Equality – this can include physical, mental health, learning or sensory disabilities and includes conditions such as dementia as well as hearing or sight impairment.	Y		This review is aimed at having a positive impact on children, young people and their parents/carers by improving support and services provided to them. The recommendations will be further the intent of the Equality Act 2010.
9. Racial equality	N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact racial equality but should have an overall positive impact on support and services for all children, young people with SEND and their parents/carers.
10. Gender equality	N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact gender equality but should have an overall positive impact on support and services for all children, young people with SEND and their parents/carers.

11. Sexual orientation equality		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact sexual orientation equality but should have an overall positive impact on support and services for all children, young people with SEND and their parents/carers.
12. Gender re-assignment		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact gender re-assignment but should have an overall positive impact on support and services for all children, young people with SEND and their parents/carers.
13. Age equality		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact age equality but should have an overall positive impact on support and services for all children, young people with SEND and their parents/carers.
14. Religion and belief equality		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact religion and belief equality but should have an overall positive impact on support and services for all children, young people with SEND and their parents/carers.
15. Pregnancy and maternity equality		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact on pregnancy and maternity equality but should have an overall positive impact on all groups by improving support and services for children and young people with SEND.
16. Marriage and civil partnership equality		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact marriage and civil partnership equality but should have an overall positive impact on support and services for all children, young people with SEND and their parents/carers.
17. Please give details of any other potential impacts on any other group (e.g. those on lower incomes/carers/ex-offenders, armed forces communities) and on promoting good community relations.	No other impact has been identified.			
18. If an adverse/negative impact has been identified can it be justified on grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group or for any other reason?	N/A			
19. If there is any difference in the impact of the activity when considered for each of the equality groups listed in 8 – 14 above; how significant is the difference in terms of its nature and the number of people likely to be affected?	The review intends to ensure children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers receive support and services according to statutory obligations and to help shape future service improvements.			

20. Could the impact constitute unlawful discrimination in relation to any of the Equality Duties?		N	
21. What further information or data is required to better understand the impact? Where and how can that information be obtained?	We considered a wide range of data from local and national sources. This was collated in an evidence pack which is available on BFC website.		
22. On the basis of sections 7 – 17 above is a full impact assessment required?		N	
23. If a full impact assessment is not required; what actions will you take to reduce or remove any potential differential/adverse impact, to further promote equality of opportunity through this activity or to obtain further information or data? Please complete the action plan in full, adding more rows as needed.			
Action	Timescale	Person Responsible	Milestone/Success Criteria
See recommendations contained in report.		Cllr Mrs Gill Birch	Recommendations are endorsed by the O&S Commission and agreed by the Executive.
24. Which service, business or work plan will these actions be included in?	Overview & Scrutiny Commission work plan		
25. Please list the current actions undertaken to advance equality or examples of good practice identified as part of the screening?	Please see recommendations contained in the report.		
26. Assistant director's signature.	Signature:		Date:

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To: Executive
18 October 2022

Financial Hardship Action Plan and Household Support Fund (Phase 3)
Executive Director: People
Assistant Director: Chief Executive's Office

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To set out the proposed routes for distributing the funding from the third phase of the Household Support Fund, provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 1.2 To brief the Executive on the council's new Financial Hardship Action Plan, setting out a strategic and sustainable approach to supporting residents experiencing hardship.

2 Recommendations

2.1 To approve the distribution of the Household Support Fund (Phase three) through the following routes (more detail provided in 5.4.1):

- 2.1.1 Supermarket vouchers to Free School Meal pupils at Bracknell Forest schools, ages 5-16.**
- 2.1.2 Offering the local foodbanks additional funding, including to provide fuel vouchers and fresh food.**
- 2.1.3 Purchase supermarket vouchers to distribute to low-income households receiving income based council tax reduction or housing benefit but not the benefits, such as universal credit, which would qualify them for the £650 national cost of living payment.**
- 2.1.4 Enhancing the Local Welfare Scheme provision, allowing applications from households in hardship who would not otherwise automatically qualify for support.**

2.2 To endorse the financial hardship action plan (2022-2024) for operational implementation.

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 There is increasing financial hardship in the community, and nationally, related to rising inflation and the cost of living crisis. This has extended the financial uncertainty many households faced during the pandemic. The financial hardship action plan offers a preventative approach to hardship, drawing together existing support across the voluntary, community and faith sector and council to maximise resources. This aims to help residents be more financially independent and the community more resilient.
- 3.2 Residents are likely to be concerned about their finances and Councillors may be asked what support is available, the action plan aims to help answer these questions.

- 3.3 The commitments within the action plan will be delivered over the next 18 months, however the council recognises that there is also immediate hardship facing many households in the borough. Therefore, the additional funding provided within the Household Support Fund is welcomed short term support. The recommendations on distributing this funding are set out to enable the funding to be distributed to as many households as possible through mechanisms available between now and March 2023.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The relevant Officer and Councillor groups considered other options for spending the Household Support Fund, but it was concluded that these would not be as effective as those recommended for supporting those most in need. The proposals broadly follow the previously agreed mechanism in distributing preceding tranches of funding. Discussions with other councils also show that many are also choosing to fund supermarket vouchers and boosting existing support mechanisms such as welfare funds or voluntary and community sector partners.
- 4.2 There is no statutory requirement to deliver a financial hardship action plan, and there are limited additional resources available to do this, so the plan makes best use of existing resources. The Executive could decide not to endorse the delivery of the action plan, or any further development. However, given the current economic climate, without any action there is likely to be increasing pressure on household finances and on demand for services such as welfare, housing, social care and council tax in the near future.

5 Supporting Information

Short Term / Crisis Support – Government Funding

- 5.1 Several tranches of government funds have previously been issued for councils to distribute including previous iterations of the Household Support Fund (HSF) and the energy rebate scheme. These are also additional direct government payments like the £650 cost of living payment, see Appendix A. The different funds that have been available to households, at a local and national level, are detailed in Appendix A.
- 5.2 Further funding of £555,000 is being allocated to Bracknell Forest Council by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as part of the HSF. This must be spent between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023. The aim of the fund is to support households with the cost of energy, food and water bills.
- 5.3 There have been a number of changes to the conditions of the grant for this current tranche of funding, primarily:
- No ringfencing to specific cohorts such as families or pensioners.
 - Adding the requirement to operate at least part of the scheme on an application basis
 - Authorities must particularly consider those groups who may not have benefitted from any of the recent cost of living support.
 - Authorities should prioritise supporting households with the cost of energy.
- 5.4 Taking this guidance, knowledge of local cohorts and the assessment of existing mechanisms into account, along with discussions with the Officer Financial Hardship

Group and Member Welfare Steering Group, the following routes for distributing the funding are recommended:

- 5.4.1 Purchase supermarket vouchers for free school meal (FSM) eligible children attending Bracknell Forest schools aged 5-16 years. It is proposed that households will receive a voucher of £30 per child in December and £15 in February to cover the winter period. This would reach approximately 2,400 children. This will use approximately £108,000 of funding.
- 5.4.2 Offer additional funding to the local foodbanks (Bracknell and Crowthorne) to purchase fresh food and to offer fuel vouchers. This will use approximately £40,000 of the funding.
- 5.4.3 Purchase supermarket vouchers to distribute to low-income households receiving income based council tax reduction or housing benefit but not the benefits, such as universal credit, which would qualify the household for the £650 cost of living payment. They would automatically receive £200 per household. This would reach approximately 1,500 households, using £300,000 of the funding.
- 5.4.4 Use the existing Local Welfare Scheme application process to offer support under the HSF. Residents will receive varying payments depending on their circumstances and number of people in the household. This will provide direct support for costs related to energy and food. This aims to reach households who were previously just about managing and may not be qualifying for wider support. It also means a wider cohort such as FSM equivalent under-fives, electively home education pupils, 16+ pupils, and SEND children attending out of borough schools can apply for an equivalent voucher if they are low income. This will use any remaining funding.
- 5.4.5 Administration costs for delivery are also covered by the Household Support fund. This will include the essential staffing costs to deliver the application element (5.4.4) of the funding as well as printing and postage costs for the distribution of the supermarket vouchers.
- 5.5 Learning from the previous phase of the funding (April to September) has been considered when developing the current plans, including changes in neighbouring authorities policies, affecting children at out of borough schools and the challenges around distributing voucher to early years settings. The full details for the funding allocations are set out in Appendix B.
- 5.6 The previous school holiday vouchers will be re-branded as a cost of living support payment, to move away from the growing expectation for parents to receive vouchers every holiday period. It is not known how long this funding will continue to be available by the DWP.
- 5.7 Previous cohorts who have received vouchers may not now automatically qualify to receive them, such as children in Early Years settings. They will however be able to apply for the equivalent support through the Local Welfare Scheme. This offers greater flexibility to families in the support available, recognising that there will be a range of needs present. Application through the Local Welfare Scheme will also mean the council can directly offer wider information and signposting on available support. Local promotion and communication will aim to encourage this application, so no previously eligible families miss out.

- 5.8 The previous Household Support Fund policy will be updated on the website to reflect these distribution routes and the further detail.

Taking a strategic and sustainable approach - Financial Hardship Action Plan

- 5.9 Whilst the government funding is vital in the current short-term crisis, it is not a sustainable solution to helping residents increase their financial stability and resilience. Therefore, alongside these recent government funds, the council has been developing a longer-term approach.
- 5.10 Bracknell Forest is broadly an affluent borough, where there is high employment, high levels of education and good health. However, this is not the case for all residents and this affluence, can hide the areas of deprivation. In the least deprived neighbourhood in Bracknell Forest, 1.5% of people are estimated to be income-deprived compared to 14.7% in the most deprived neighbourhood. More than one in ten households in the borough are known to be 'low income'¹.
- 5.11 The rising financial pressure is expected to increase demand on council services, particularly statutory duties around homelessness, the Local Welfare Scheme, and requests for council tax support and social care financial assessments. Indirect effects should also be expected for increasing health and social care needs and increased demand on the community and voluntary sector. A more preventative, upstream, approach intends to improve the independence and resilience of the community.
- 5.12 There are many organisations in the community, and teams across the council, who already provide some element of support around hardship, from foodbanks to council tax support. However, there is not currently a joined-up approach to viewing the individual as a whole. A more unified approach could pinpoint those most in need sooner to prevent escalation of more complex cases and to support a faster return to economic security.
- 5.13 To better understand the challenges and opportunities, a needs analysis was conducted in the Spring 2022 to map local financial hardship. This provided a detailed evidence base to understand key cohorts and risks for financial hardship and where there is the opportunity for better targeting resources. Further engagement then took place with subject matter experts within the council, partners and across the VCFS to establish practical ways to address these challenges. This formed the basis for the action plan (Appendix C).
- 5.14 This development work has been possible through the COVID Welfare funding committed within the 2021-22 budget. There are currently limited further resources dedicated to preventative financial hardship action, therefore a key focus has been to join up existing workstreams and share skills and expertise to make the biggest impact.
- 5.15 The outcomes of the action plan will be measurable and quantifiable to demonstrate the impact for the individual and the council. Bringing this together aims to achieve a preventative, upstream approach to improve the independence and resilience of the community whilst managing the demand on council services.

¹ As defined by those known to the council to be receiving Housing benefit or income-based council tax reduction.

- 5.16 The action plan sets out an overall vision “For all residents to be financially stable, independent, and engaged with the local community and economy, through reducing the impact and extent of financial hardship.” This is supported by two underpinning priorities and three targeted priorities:
- Underpinning priority one: Signposting and accessing support
 - Underpinning priority two: Promoting Community Initiatives
 - Targeted priority three: Essential Living Costs
 - Targeted priority four: Employment Support
 - Targeted priority five: Financial Literacy
- 5.17 Each priority then has one or more objectives with specific actions and outcomes associated. This aims to provide a clear structure for the deliverables and aims of the plan. The actions contain those that will benefit the whole population, e.g. “Promote the use of the Open Learning Centre for IT lessons and access to computers” and more targeted work, e.g. “Support unemployed residents with ‘low barriers to work’ into employment”.
- 5.18 Beyond the 18-month plan period, the actions undertaken aim to increase the independence and financial resilience of residents. Therefore, this aims to reduce the need for the same level of intervention from the council longer term. This will continue to be reviewed as the delivery of the plan progresses.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 Under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 ‘A Minister of the Crown may pay a grant to a local authority in England towards expenditure incurred or to be incurred by it’. In exercise of those powers the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions made the determination known as the Household Support Fund Grant Determination 2022 No. 31/3096 on 20 April 2022 the purpose of which is to provide support for expenditure lawfully incurred or to be incurred by the Council in accordance with specific grant conditions to provide support to households particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs or housing costs (in exceptional cases of genuine emergency) to help them with significantly rising living costs.

In addition to this the Council has a general power under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything an individual may generally do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation and the power is exercised in accordance with the limitations specified in the Act. Therefore, the Council is able to receive, accept and utilise the grant in accordance with specific grant conditions and relevant guidance.

In administering the HSF the Department of Work and Pensions has issued guidance for local authorities known as ‘The Household Support Fund (1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022): final Guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England. The guidance indicates the Council should develop a ‘local eligibility framework and approach’ to enable access to grant funding that best supports households most in need but includes flexibility to develop a local delivery approach which fits the schemes objectives. This guidance must be followed when administering the fund and awards must meet frameworks set out in the guidance around ring fenced funding and eligible spend.

The United Kingdom left the EU on 31 January 2020, and the State Aid regime has been replaced by a similar regime known as 'Subsidy Control'. Under this regime, a subsidy (or in this case a grant) is a measure which is

- given by a public authority; and
- makes a financial or in-kind contribution to an enterprise which is not available on market terms; and
- affects international trade.

Whilst the giving of a grants is not likely to be caught being unlikely to affect international trade both government and local procurement regulation must be followed. In particular, the DWP guidance explains that: 'the funding is intended to benefit households most in need of support with food, energy bills, related essentials and (exceptionally) housing costs as the economy recovers this winter. The funds should not be used for any economic undertaking. Whichever way you use the funding, including where you work in partnership with others you should consider all subsidy rules (previously known as state aid) and issues. Check whether the 'de minimums' regulation exception applies. You should follow government procurement procedures where relevant.'

Legal advice was given previously about the procurement aspect of vouchers allotted under the under the Fund. Compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 does not require consideration in terms of distribution, given that payments to individuals are outside the scope of the PCR 2015, however care will need to be taken to ensure that all grant funding conditions, and any associated guidance is complied with.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 Once the level of grant is confirmed, the level of expenditure will be within that cash envelope and so no additional burden on Council finances.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.3 Engagement was undertaken with council officers and the Members Welfare Group as part of the development of the Household Support Fund (phase three) recommendations. Engagement has also been held at multiple points to develop the action plan with council staff, councillors and partners across the community. This feedback has been incorporated throughout.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 The Equalities Impact assessment for the Financial Hardship Action Plan is attached as appendix D. A previous EqIA was completed for the previous household support fund and will be updated in line with the final guidance from DWP once released, this is currently drafted as appendix E.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 Not addressing hardship is likely to increase the pressure on council services and thus risks for the council. Therefore, these plans seek to reduce this.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.6 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to have no impact on emissions of CO₂. The reasons the Council believes that this will have no impact on emissions is that the majority of recommendations are working with existing resources.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

- 6.7 There is a direct link between financial hardship and health and wellbeing. These recommendations seek to reduce hardship and therefore this is anticipated to have a positive impact on residents' health and wellbeing.

Background Papers

[Household Support Fund: guidance for local councils - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils)

Contact for further information

Mark Barratt, Early Help and Communities - 01344 351447

Mark.barratt@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Katie Flint, Chief Executive's Office - 01344 352217

Katie.flint@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Appendix A – Recent Financial Support March-November 2022

There have already been a number of direct financial support offered to residents, some targeting specific hardship vulnerabilities. Some have been administered at a local level, others nationally. The proposals set out in the paper aim to complement these routes.

Target Cohort	Support	Delivery
Universal	£400 to all households 'Energy Bills Support Scheme'	October
	£150 energy rebate to all band A-D properties	May
Low income	£650 'cost of living' payment directly into the bank accounts of those receiving eligible benefits incl. Universal Credit, tax credits, pension credit and other means tested benefits.	Split into two payments for July and Autumn
	£150 discretionary energy rebate to households in Council Tax Bands E-H who currently receive income based council tax support	Summer
	£120 discretionary energy rebate to households receiving council tax reduction but not benefits that qualify for the £650 cost of living payment.	Autumn
	£100 council tax reduction to all households receiving council tax support	2022/23 tax bill
Pension age	£300 pension age households	November/December
	£150 Warm Homes Discount	Winter
	£100 in supermarket vouchers to pension age holders in receipt of housing benefit or council tax support. (Local HSF2 scheme)	Summer
Families	£120 in supermarket vouchers per child registered for FSM. (Local HSF2 scheme)	May-November holidays
Disabled households	£150 for those receiving disability benefits, including DLA, PIP and attendance allowance	September
	£50 + £35 in supermarket vouchers to low income working age disabled and carer households without children (Local HSF2 scheme)	August/September
Care leavers	£50 in supermarket vouchers to Bracknell Forest care leavers under 21. (Local HSF2 scheme)	Summer
	£50 discretionary energy rebate to Bracknell Forest care leavers under 25	Summer

Appendix B – Household Support Fund Phase 3 Summary

Estimates of spend

Route	Cohort	Value	Number reached	Total
1	FSM pupils at Bracknell Forest schools	£30+£15 supermarket voucher	2,400 children	£108,000
2	Foodbank fresh food and energy support	£40,000	n/a	£40,000
3	Low income households not receiving other benefits	£200	1,500 households	£300,000
4	Application Local Welfare Scheme route	£50-£350	200-400 households	£55,000
Sub-total				£503,000
Admin	Additional staff for assessment and funding distribution	£50,000	n/a	£50,000
	Printing and Posting costs	£2,000	n/a	£2,000
Admin Sub-total				£52,000
Total				£555,000

Appendix C – Bracknell Forest Council Financial Hardship Action Plan 2022-2024

[Attached as separate document]

Appendix D – EqIA Bracknell Forest Council Financial Hardship Action Plan 2022-2024

[Attached as separate document]

Appendix E – EqIA Bracknell Forest Council Household Support Fund Phase 3

[Attached as separate document]

Bracknell Forest Financial Hardship Action Plan

September 2022-March 2024

Version 1.2

BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL

Contents

Bracknell Forest Council’s Vision	1
What is financial hardship?.....	2
Why do we need an action plan?.....	2
Early Intervention and Prevention.....	3
Work to Date	4
One Council.....	5
Partnerships Approach.....	7
Monitoring and review	7
Action Plan.....	9
Priority one: Signposting and accessing support	10
Priority two: Promoting Community Initiatives	11
Priority three: Essential Living Costs	12
Priority four: Employment Support.....	15
Priority five: Financial Literacy	17

Bracknell Forest Council’s Vision

“For all residents to be financially stable, independent, and engaged with the local community and economy, through reducing the impact and extent of financial hardship.”

Bracknell Forest Council is taking a proactive approach to tackling financial hardship in the borough. Financial hardship can have a considerable impact on a person’s life. Even experiencing short-term but acute financial pressures can have long term impacts, both at an individual and a community level. Unfortunately, financial hardship is often a cycle that is difficult to break, manifesting in many ways throughout life and often being passed on to future generations. This action plan aims to break this cycle.

We want our community to be as financially resilient as possible, this will help residents engage with our local economy, taking part in leisure and shopping activities and contributing through employment and volunteering opportunities. This financial hardship action plan aims to encourage and support this resilience for residents in the community.

We know that tackling financial hardship will take time and there is no quick or short-term fix and therefore it is necessary to take a longer-term approach which can be sustained. Our action plan will outline the commitment to help alleviate financial hardship in the borough and how we will devise services to have the greatest impact.

What is financial hardship?

Bracknell Forest is broadly an affluent area, and this can partly mask the extent of the local challenges around hardship. Due to the affluence, there can be an underlying sense of comparative poverty where individuals cannot afford what their neighbours can. This is in addition to national standardised definitions of poverty. It is also becoming more apparent that even previously affluent households are facing higher financial pressures. Thus, we have focused this work to address financial hardship more broadly than the definition of poverty. This allows us to capture the most acute needs of poverty as well as recognising many residents may not meet the traditional definition of poverty but are experiencing financial hardship.

There is no nationwide definition of financial hardship therefore we have combined several aspects of poverty and hardship into a single definition to guide our approach. Bracknell Forest Council has defined financial hardship as:

“When an individual or household cannot meet the basic daily costs such as food, utility bills and housing costs, which consequently, affects their health and wellbeing. Financial hardship does not reflect any lack of capability, quality of relationships or motivation. Financial hardship can include long term poverty or a short-term change in circumstances.”

Why do we need an action plan?

There has been significant focus on the cost of living in recent months. The government has invested in a number of funds such as the Household Support Fund and Energy Rebate schemes to provide financial support to households. This has been vital during the period of crisis however the short-term nature of the support that does not provide sustainable solutions for the growing financial challenges faced by individuals and the community.

The council recognises the need to further support residents beyond the statutory requirements and recent government schemes. This prompted a financial hardship needs analysis to be completed. The findings from the analysis, as well as conversations with stakeholders and partners in the community, identified the necessity to have a structured approach towards financial hardship in the borough.

Financial hardship has a direct impact on residents in terms of not just their financial wellbeing, but also wider societal factors such as physical and mental health or crime and disorder. The need analysis completed in March 2022 identified that individuals experiencing financial hardship are more likely to suffer with poor health and vice versa.

Bracknell Forest is in the least deprived 15% of all Local Authorities and is ranked 35 out of 317 authorities when looking at the overall Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). However, there is substantial variation in levels of deprivation between wards in the borough.

1.5% of people are “income-deprived” in least deprived areas compared to 14.7% in most deprived. Generally, it is wards in Bracknell town centre where financial hardship is the highest.



Local data has also identified low-income households based on council held information; this demonstrates the scale of the challenge locally. The Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) identified in March 2022, 5,527 low-income households with 3,077 children. This is approximately 10% of all households in the borough. Of these households:



2,003 were pension age and not in work.



2,117 were working age households and not in work.



1,407 were working age households in work

The needs analysis also outlined some key statistics for low-income residents in the borough. At the time the needs analysis was completed:

- 9.6% of Bracknell Forest households struggled with food insecurity
- 9.4% of households within the borough claimed council tax support
- 15.8% of the adult population in Bracknell Forest found meeting monthly bills a heavy burden and were regularly in arrears with bills
- 4.7% of households were living in fuel poverty in the borough.

Children that are born into poverty are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases, such as asthma as well as diet-related problems such as tooth decay, malnutrition, obesity and diabetes. A study by the child poverty action group also showed that low-income children are four times more likely to develop a mental health problem by the age of 11. There is also a long-term link to poorer career and skills outcomes. Additionally, in January 2021, poor mental health rates in individuals who were unemployed were 43% compared with a rate of 27% for employed individuals.

Bracknell Forest has relatively low levels of crime and is ranked 30th out of 317 local authorities for crime. However, Bracknell Forest's most deprived wards Priestwood and Garth, Wildridings and Central, and Old Bracknell score significantly higher on levels of crime than all other wards indicating a link between hardship and crime.

In addition to the individual quality of living benefits, having an action plan will households be more financially stable and be in a stronger position to contribute back to the economy. This has become even more important in light of the cost of living challenges.

Early Intervention and Prevention

Financial hardship can manifest in lots of ways for individuals, for some this will mean they need additional support from the council in the form of council tax reductions, or welfare support, it can also escalate into homelessness, social care needs or more complex health challenges. All of this means additional demand on council services, which, given the increasing cost of living, is not sustainable long term.

The additional demand on the council presents considerable financial challenges within the organisation and increases in costly interventions when support is received too late. Therefore, the financial hardship action plan contains both immediate interventions to reduce the direct consequences of financial hardship but also more proactive, preventative

interventions. This is in part achieved through working more closely with the voluntary, community and faith sector. The financial hardship action plan aims to support all residents maximise their income. It also looks to work with local employers to improve skills and opportunities for residents.

Whilst this is an essential focus in the current climate, the councils overarching approach aims to reduce the longer term need for intervention around hardship. The ambition remains to create and support communities to be self-sufficient and for residents to be financially independent.

Work to Date

In parallel to the financial hardship action plan being developed, work has been underway across the council and the voluntary, community and faith sector to support residents with the immediate impacts of financial hardship.

A cross directorate officers' group was created in 2020 to lead on, and champion, work that would ensure a joined-up approach across the borough between the council, partner agencies and local charities. This aimed to ensure the best possible support is available to residents who either are currently experiencing or may face longer-term financial crisis. This group also coordinated the development work to distribute internal welfare funding and government grants such as the Winter Grant Scheme, Covid Local Support Grant and Household Support Fund.

A Councillor welfare steering group was also set up as a cross party group to focus on financial hardship challenges. In particular, they have advised on the distribution of the internal COVID recovery funding dedicated to local welfare support. Their role has also included overseeing the distribution of government hardship funds.

The internal welfare funding agreed as part of the COVID recovery package in March 2021 has allowed the council to increase the proactive approach to hardship and advance the way the council can address hardship. Resource was secured on an operational and strategic level as well as the purchase of software to support the council identify low-income households and target support to them accordingly. The software allows the council to run cohort specific campaigns and support residents at an individual level with income maximisation. Training has been carried out for frontline workers across the council and VCS to help identify households living in fuel poverty and provide advice and support to drive down energy bills and claim support where eligible.

The Local Welfare Scheme was launched to replace two previous policies which were out of keeping with the needs of residents. The Local Welfare Scheme has supported households with emergency payments towards energy bills, food support or essential white goods. Over £45,000 has been awarded since April 2021, providing very direct support to more than 220 households in exceptional hardship.

Over £1.5 million of funding has been received from Department for Work and Pensions as part of the pandemic recovery and cost of living support. This has been distributed directly to vulnerable low-income households in Bracknell Forest since December 2020. Part of this funding has enabled the distribution of supermarket vouchers to 2,600 Free School Meal eligible pupils each holiday period. There have also been wider grants distributed by the council to low-income households as part of the energy rebate funding.

Support for families during school holidays has been expanded through the Holiday Activities and Food programme for children aged 5-16 in low-income households. In the 2021, school

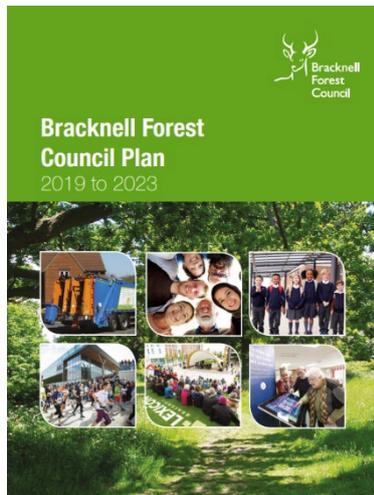
summer holidays, 11 holiday clubs offered activities across 14 sites including sports activities, cooking activities, arts and crafts and much more. 690 children attended including a number of children with additional needs. Since Summer 2021, the number of providers and activities increased to 19 providers across 19 sites for the 2022 summer holidays.

One Council

There are already a number of workstreams in place throughout the council and working with partners, looking to reduce the impacts of hardship and support individuals to be more financially stable and independent. Work is underway in relation to the Levelling Up agenda and UK Shared Prosperity Fund, partnership working with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), and recovery from the pandemic. Therefore, a core aim of this action plan is to join these workstreams into a single coherent approach. This aims to maximise the currently available resources, avoiding duplication and sharing the skills and experience of different groups in the community.

There are many workstreams and strategies across Bracknell Forest Council that link with the financial hardship work. This includes several detailed below.

Council Plan

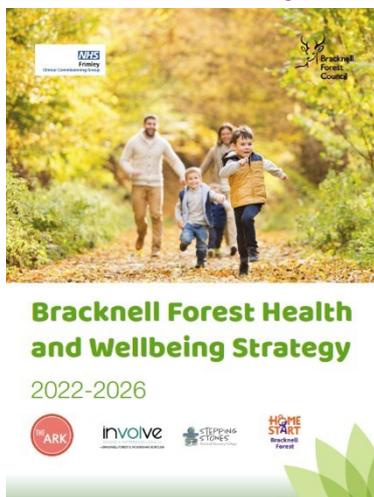


The Council Plan sets out the key objectives and strategic direction for 2019 to 2023. The plan is structured around six themes that all directorates contribute to. In particular, the overarching themes of creating value for money, economic resilience, caring for you and your family and communities, all relate to elements of the financial hardship agenda.

Within the 2022-23 service plans, there are some specific actions related to reducing financial hardship:

- 1.2.02 - Maximise the use of data to identify low-income households and engage with them to increase their household income and financial independence.
- 4.1.04 - Establish a cross-council approach and action plan to support residents in financial hardship to move to a more sustainable long-term position, improving their health and wellbeing outcomes.

Health and Well-being strategy



The Health and Wellbeing Strategy includes a focus on the wider determinants of health by considering the broader influences on health and wellbeing. Financial stability, including meaningful employment is a key wider determinant of health and can positively influence physical and mental health and wellbeing. Conversely, economic hardship can have a negative impact on health and particularly mental health. Employment and financial loss is cited in the strategy as a key wider determinant of health that was particularly impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Public Health tackling inequalities is a cross cutting theme of the strategy. This means that actions will focus on those at risk of experiencing the poorest health and takes a wider view of health and wellbeing beyond lifestyle and individual factors.

Housing strategy (draft)

The 'cost of living' crisis is recognised as a key issue in the draft housing strategy due to its potential impact in pushing low-income households into financial hardship and homelessness. "Meeting the challenge of a 'cost of living' crisis" is identified as a priority for action within the overall objective of preventing and reducing homelessness. This includes the commitment to continue to offer Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to provide short-term help to households in receipt of benefits. The strategy also sets out the action to identify households at risk of financial hardship using datasets and software such as LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker) and targeting assistance to help avert homelessness.

Looking ahead, the ambition is to develop a co-ordinated response to increase the ability of local households to cope with financial hardship and to ensure that they have the life skills and support they need to successfully secure and maintain housing for themselves

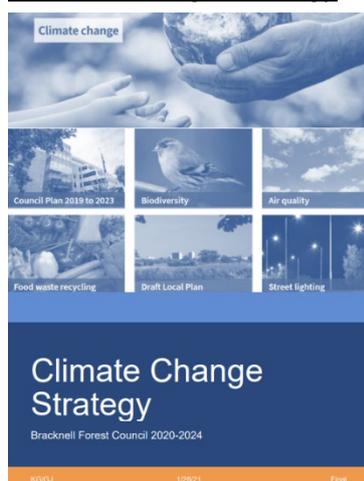
DWP Partnership agreement



The DWP and the council recognise the significant challenges that Covid-19 has created. The national picture of declining job numbers in previously prevalent sectors, coupled with an increase in the number of people seeking welfare support, is evident in Bracknell Forest. Alongside these challenges run the issues of accessibility to services for those most in need as well as uncertainty in employment, training and education options for young people.

The DWP and the council are working together to achieve a joint ambition for Bracknell Forest with more collaborative projects to recover the economy and reduce further unemployment across the town. Employers are key to generating a range of pathways to sustainable jobs, growing our local economy to provide more high-value and well-paid jobs for our residents and drive growth in key sectors.

Climate Change Strategy



The 'cost of living' crisis and climate change are closely linked. Cost of living is recognised as a key issue in the climate change strategy due to the intersectional nature and cross cutting themes; efficient energy at home, food waste, and sustainable travel. The current climate change strategy aims to address the impact of climate change on our local communities by implementing action to minimise the impact on our residents. In terms of financial hardship, this includes; local production of renewable energy and domestic eco-heating initiatives to reduce the overall cost to residents, greening our waste projects to encourage recycling and reusing, and promotion of active travel initiatives such as walking and cycling as this is a low-cost form of transport.

Equalities



The pandemic and the 'cost of living' crisis have had a disproportionately negative impact and been more severe for some groups than others and helped to entrench some existing inequalities, while widening others. Working with our partners, the council has an integral role both in advancing equality of opportunity, fostering good community relations and also seeking to eliminating unlawful discrimination and harassment and helping to reduce inequality. This means focusing our resources on people and areas with the greatest need as well as early help and prevention so that struggling or vulnerable people can maximise their opportunities to become independent.

Levelling Up and UKSPF



The UKSPF is a central pillar of the Levelling Up agenda, broadly replacing previous EU structural funding. The primary goal is to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK. There is a pre-determined allocation to each local authority based upon defined indices of deprivation, economic activity, and health indicators.

The fund should boost productivity, enhance pay and living standards by growing the private sector, spread opportunities and improve public services. The fund also aims to restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, empowering local leaders and communities. An Investment Plan for the core funding and for the Multiply initiative will be delivered between 2022 and 2024.

Partnerships Approach

Meaningful and successful programmes of work are also ongoing within the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) in Bracknell Forest who are supporting residents with their own initiatives and services. This action plan looks to improve partnership working across the borough to ensure this valuable expertise and experience, and the limited resources, are put to the best use to deliver the greatest outcomes. A financial hardship forum has been established with the voluntary, community and faith sector in Bracknell Forest to further connect organisations and enable improved partnership working. The community led forum will have representation from the council to feedback on the action plan as well as contribute to wider work with partners.

Monitoring and review

The action plan will be regularly monitored through an established Officers Action Plan Delivery Group. The group will meet regularly to discuss the progress of the actions as well as identifying any risks that may arise. The group will also monitor the outcomes of each action. The desired outcomes are identified within the action plan and supported by a technical annex. Performance indicators will also be used for actions with pre-existing datasets to measure success.

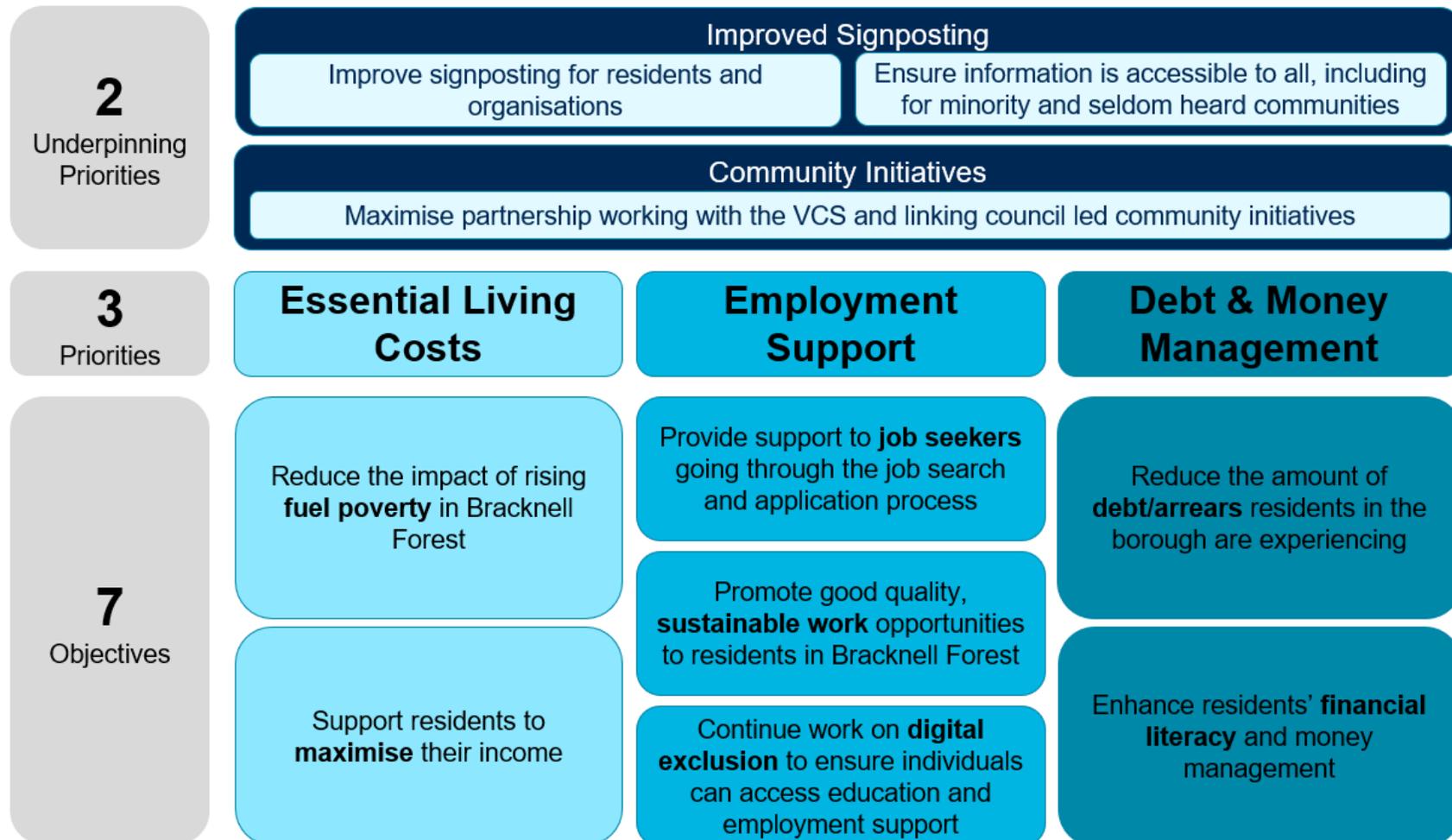
The delivery group will update the Members Welfare Steering Group and CMT at regular intervals on the progress and any changes to the plan. Periodic updates will also be shared with the VCFS Financial Hardship Forum.

A report will be presented to CMT and the Members Welfare Steering Group at the 12 month point, reviewing the progress of actions and detailing successes and further opportunities. Subsequently, this will help with reviewing future actions needed. A full review of the action plan delivery will be completed in May 2024.

The purpose of this action plan is to make a meaningful difference to Bracknell Forest households and to seek to ease the pressures faced by those in hardship. A successful action plan will result in residents having more opportunities for stable employment, fewer households needing emergency welfare and financial support, improvements in physical and mental health and overall, a decrease in households experiencing hardship.

Action Plan

The priorities have been identified using the key findings from the financial hardship needs analysis as well as feedback from frontline staff and partners. This is set within the context of the national and global economic challenges, driving increases in costs.



Priority one: Signposting and accessing support

Residents need to know where they can go to access support as well as what support is available to them. Without this, many residents will continue to struggle, and local support will not be fully utilised. There are already several support services for local residents, but partners reported that there is insufficient signposting for hardship support in the borough both for residents and front-line organisations. Therefore, residents are missing out on support they may be entitled to. Signposting is an overarching priority throughout the action plan and unlocks the full potential of the wider objectives in each section.

Priority One: Signposting and accessing support						
Ref	Actions	Timescales	Lead Officer	Outcomes	Supporting strategies/workstreams	Progress (RAG)
Objective One: Improve signposting for residents and organisations						
1.1.1	Create an interim help and support section on the council website for those facing hardship.	September 2022	Claudia Trott	Increase in page visits monthly.	Council Plan 1.2 Digital and ICT Strategy	
1.1.2	Integrate local financial hardship support and information into future development of an online directory.	December 2023	TBC - business change	Increase in page visits monthly.	Business Change Programme	
1.1.3	Create a hard copy directory to include financial support services for those who are unable to access online information.	March 2023	Claudia Trott	100% of front-line services within the council issued with a hard copy.		
Objective Two: Ensure information is accessible to all, including for minority and seldom heard communities						
1.2.1	Provide support and training to local libraries, community centres, religious settings and schools staff to educate on support that is available.	April 23	Claudia Trott	Training sessions held across the year, attended by a minimum of 10 staff.	Equality Scheme	
1.2.2	Improve access to signposting information for ethnic minority groups in the borough.	April 2024	Harjit Hunjan	Community engagement officer to reach out to a minimum	Equality Scheme	

				of 6 ethnic shops across the borough.		
1.2.3	Improve access to signposting information for disabled residents in the borough.	April 2024	Claudia Trott	Connect with The Ark Trust and provide information/ support to a minimum of five of their staff.	Equality Scheme	

Priority two: Promoting Community Initiatives

There is sometimes a stigma associated with financial hardship and getting help from the local council or VCFS, which can cause social exclusion and prolonged hardship amongst residents. Longer term sustainability also relies on a community led approach, to make the most of the specialist groups already set up. Therefore, it is important to work closely with local communities to build community champions and enhance the options for residents to help each other. By strengthening communities, it is hoped to reduce the social exclusion felt by individuals and stigma associated with asking for help. It should also assist with early intervention and individuals seeking support before they find themselves in crisis and needing to access council services.

Priority Two: Promoting Community Initiatives

Ref	Actions	Timescales	Lead Officers	Outcomes	Supporting strategies/ workstreams	Progress (RAG)
Objective One: Maximise partnership working with the VCFS and linking council led community initiatives						
2.1.1	Connect with local sports facilities and voluntary, community and faith groups to ensure activities are accessible and affordable for all.	June 23	Harjit Hunjan	Connect with a minimum of 6 facilities/groups.	Health and Wellbeing strategy Council Plan 4.11	
2.1.2	Establish a Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector financial hardship forum	September 2022	Sarah Walker – The Kerith Community Church	Forum to meet at least once a quarter.		

2.1.3	Integrate financial hardship work into council and VCFS community initiatives	April 2024	Claudia Trott	Council representation at 100% of VCFS hardship forum sessions.		
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Priority three: Essential Living Costs

The global consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic and war in Ukraine, have triggered a drastic increase in inflation which continues to affect many households across the nation and in Bracknell Forest. The significant increase in energy bills in April 2022 and the upcoming increase in October 2022, paired with the increase in food and housing costs means more households are facing fuel poverty. Energy bills account for more of households monthly spending and some residents are having to make difficult choices about spending their limited resources, including choosing between heating and eating. Both a warm home and a healthy diet is essential for physical and mental health. A cold home can lead to poor health conditions particularly in the elderly. Maximising residents' income will not only reduce the impacts felt from financial hardship but will act to support positive physical and mental health.

Priority Three: Essential living costs

Ref	Actions	Timescales	Lead Officer	Outcomes	Supporting strategies/workstreams	Progress (RAG)
Objective One: Reduce the impact of rising fuel poverty in Bracknell Forest						
3.1.1	Provide training for frontline staff within the council, VCFS and councillors.	October 2022	Claudia Trott	Minimum of 25 front line staff and 10 councillors to attend training. Minimum 80% of attendees find training helpful.		
3.1.2	Establish a fuel poverty steering group.	November 2022	Sharon Warner	Meeting throughout the year with attendees from every directorate		

3.1.3	Promote winter fuel payment take up in the autumn.	October 2022-March 2023	Claudia Trott	Social media campaigns between October + March aimed at those that would need to claim.	Health and well-being strategy	
3.1.4	Use the incoming Household Support Fund grant to fund initiatives to directly reduce energy costs or offset the increasing cost of living.	March 2023	Mark Barratt	100% of funding spent. At least 4,000 low-income households receive a payment.	DWP Grant Funding	
3.1.5	Inform residents on energy saving tips to help drive down energy consumption and costs.	December 2022	Claudia Trott	Publish energy saving tips in winter editions of town and country. Social media campaign in October to promote energy saving tips.	Climate Change Strategy, Housing strategy (draft)	
Objective Two: Support residents to maximise their income						
3.2.1	Run a campaign on free prescription take up.	December 2022	Claudia Trott	Social media posts promoting free prescription take up.	Health and Wellbeing strategy	
3.2.2	Targeted campaign to residents living in relative poverty who are at risk and in crisis to support them claim all eligible benefits.	April 2024	Sharon Warner	Increased contact to those 'at risk' or 'in crisis' and living in relative poverty		
3.2.3	Promote the use of cycling in Bracknell Forest as a low-cost form of transport.	July 2023	Phil Burke	Social media posts between March 2023 and July 2023.	Health and Wellbeing strategy, climate change strategy	

				Cycle maps available in sites across the borough.	Council Plan 5.7	
3.2.4	Utilise LIFT data to increase the promotion and uptake of healthy start vouchers to low-income families in the borough.	July 2023	Claudia Trott	Increased contact to residents eligible for healthy start vouchers identified through LIFT.	Health and wellbeing strategy	
3.2.5	Identify individuals with no fixed abode and support them to open a bank account.	June 2023	Sharon Okonkwo	Pilot with 5 individuals.		
3.2.6	Increase overall income for pensioners who cannot maximise their income through work.	April 2024	Sharon Warner	Identify and contact increased number of eligible residents.		
3.2.7	Encourage eligible low-income residents to save by opening a Help to Save account.	June 2023	Claudia Trott	550 Help to Save accounts opened in Bracknell Forest by June 2023.		
3.2.8	Adapt the application process for the Local Welfare Scheme to enable a wider cohort of residents to apply.	April 2023	Sharon Warner	Average of 20 households supported each month.		
3.2.9	Use LIFT data to target eligible households with DHP payments	April 2024	Sharon Warner	Identify and contact more 'in crisis' households to be offered a DHP each month.		

Priority four: Employment Support

Employment is often seen as the gateway out of hardship however this is not always the case. The needs analysis indicated there are many households in the borough that are in work both full and part time but still experiencing hardship. Support aims to include those seeking employment but also those seeking a more stable and sustainable employment opportunity.

Priority Four: Employment Support						
Ref	Actions	Timescales	Leads	Outcomes	Supporting strategies/ workstreams	Progress (RAG)
Objective One: Promote good quality, sustainable work opportunities to residents in Bracknell Forest.						
4.1.1	Carry out research into in work poverty in Bracknell Forest	September 2023	Claudia Trott	Priority cohorts and risks identified	DWP Partnership Agreement	
4.1.2	Engage with local employers on aspects of best practice including the importance of paying national living wage.	September 2023	Chris Mansfield	1-1 meetings with employers with engagement from 15 employers over a 12-month period.	DWP Partnership Agreement ESDP Council Plan 2.6	
4.1.3	Continue and build upon partnership working arrangements between BFC and DWP.	December 2023	Chris Mansfield / Adrian Davies	Quarterly meetings between DWP/BFC and relevant stakeholders.	DWP Partnership Agreement	
4.1.4	Support unemployed residents with 'low barriers to work' into employment.	January 2024	Sharon Warner	Increased number of residents referred to DWP for employment support.	DWP Partnership Agreement	

4.1.5	Promote different employment types and employers in the borough including apprenticeships.	April 2024	Chris Mansfield	Increased career days on offer in the borough annually across different organisations.	DWP Partnership Agreement ESDP	
4.1.6	Deliver courses to residents with low numeracy skills through multiply.	April 2024	Multiply Lead	Deliver 4 courses to a minimum of 40 residents.	Multiply/UKSPF	
4.1.7	Improve messaging and awareness of available childcare support for residents, to unlock increased employment opportunities.	April 2024	David Allais	Family Information Officers to attend sessions at local job clubs/other VCFS organisations a minimum of once a month. Community engagement team to distribute childcare information to a minimum of three hard-to-reach communities.		
4.1.8	Connect with local employers to increase awareness of childcare support available for employees.	October 2023	David Allais/ Chris Mansfield	1-1 meetings with employers.		
Objective Two: Provide support to job seekers going through the job search and application process						
4.2.1	Promote the use of job clubs across the borough.	April 2024	Claudia Trott / Chris Mansfield	Social media posts to promote job clubs across the borough.	DWP Partnership Agreement	
4.2.2	Create an employment support guide for residents to access online.	April 23	Chris Mansfield	Number of page views every month.	ESDP/LEP/DWP	

Objective Three: Continue work on digital exclusion to ensure individuals can access education and employment support.						
4.3.1	Provide additional support through libraries for job applications and searches.	July 2023	Fiona Atkinson	Training session completed by minimum 2 members of staff in each library location.	Council Plan 6.2	
4.3.2	Promote the use of computers in locations across the borough including Time Square and libraries as well as the libraries tablet loan scheme.	April 2024	Claudia Trott	Article in December's edition of Town and Country extra. Article in parish magazines. Increased uptake of tablets loaned out.	Digital inclusion project Council Plan 1.2	
4.3.3	Promote the use of the Open Learning Centre for IT lessons and access to computers.	December 2023	Jacqui Wakeling	Increased uptake in residents accessing IT sessions through the open learning centre.	Digital inclusion project Council Plan 1.2	

Priority five: Financial Literacy

The needs analysis identified that many residents in the borough have low levels of financial knowledge and have difficulty managing their money. Often those living in hardship face the poverty premium where they are having to pay more for services. For example, individuals may need payday loans with high interest rates as they can't access low interest rate loans through the bank, or they are having to pay bills on top up meters rather than the cheaper option of a monthly direct debit. Additionally, those with poor money management are more likely to experience debt which can be difficult to resolve and can contribute to mental health problems. Educating residents around managing money and budgeting aims to help ease some of the pressures they are facing.

Priority Five: Money management and Debt

Ref	Actions	Timescales	Leads	Outcomes	Supporting strategies/ workstreams	Progress (RAG)
Objective One: Enhance residents' financial literacy and money management						
5.1.1	Use Multiply funding to deliver courses on numeracy and managing money.	April 2024	Multiply Lead	Courses hosted in 22/23 financial year.	Multiply / UKSPF	
5.1.2	Host drop-in sessions for residents to speak to subject experts in housing/welfare/council tax.	April 2024	Claudia Trott	Quarterly drop-in sessions for residents to attend. Representation from minimum of 3 departments.	Housing Strategy (draft)	
5.1.3	Provide sessions to residents on how to reduce costs at home particularly energy saving.	April 2024	Claudia Trott	Courses hosted once every 6 months.	Housing Strategy (draft)	
5.1.4	Increase books available in Bracknell Forest libraries on money management.	March 2023	Fiona Atkinson	Increased number of books on financial support loaned each quarter.		
Objective Two: Reduce the amount of debt/arrears residents in the borough are experiencing.						
5.2.1	Review the council's debt offer to ensure appropriate support is available to residents experiencing debt or at risk of experiencing debt.	December 2023	Calvin Orr	Quarterly corporate debt meetings.		
5.2.2	Produce and provide a debt advice handbook that residents can access online as well as offline.	January 2023	Yvonne Slater	Handbook supplied to residents joining My choice.		

				Handbook available in locations across the borough.		
5.2.3	Promote awareness of the risks with loan sharks, pay day loans and high-cost credit as well as the risks of buy now pay later.	June 2023	Victoria Roseblade	<p>Presentations on loan sharks and money laundering to community groups and centres across the borough.</p> <p>Presentations on loan sharks to year 10,11 and sixth form pupils as part of the secondary schools PSHE curriculum to all 6 secondary schools within the borough.</p>	Community safety	
5.2.4	Create an information pack for new tenants advising them on anticipated costs of running their property as well as the importance of RIA and costs associated with moving into an empty property.	June 2023	Claudia Trott	<p>Booklet available to residents using My Choice.</p> <p>Information pack provided to care leavers.</p>	Housing Strategy (draft)	
5.2.5	Review the referral pathways for debt advice through Citizens Advice.	June 2023	Yvonne Slater	Increase in referrals between organisations.		

Initial Equalities Screening Record Form

Date of Screening: 07/09/2022	Directorate: Chief Executive Office	Section: Policy and Performance	
1. Activity to be assessed	<p>The implementation of a new Financial Hardship Action Plan. This includes activity undertaken by teams across the council and coordinated into a single plan to cover actions over the next 18 months.</p> <p>There are multiple priority themes and objectives set within them. This has been developed based on the data led needs analysis and qualitative information from partners, including across the community, voluntary and faith sector. There is not significant additional resources to deliver the actions, and therefore there has needed to be prioritisation of the activity that can be undertaken.</p>		
2. What is the activity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Policy/strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Function/procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Service <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational change		
3. Is it a new or existing activity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New <input type="checkbox"/> Existing		
4. Officer responsible for the screening	Claudia Trott		
5. Who are the members of the screening team?	Claudia Trott, Katie Flint, Sharon Warner, Abby Thomas, Harjit Hunjan,		
6. What is the purpose of the activity?	<p>The council has been developing a longer-term strategic approach to tackling financial hardship in Bracknell Forest. Therefore, a financial hardship action plan has been developed following on from an evidenced based needs analysis. The financial hardship action plan allows more preventative, upstream, approach and intends to improve the independence and resilience of the community.</p>		
7. Who is the activity designed to benefit/target?	The financial hardship action plan is designed to target all residents of Bracknell Forest with low, or no, income.		
Protected Characteristics	Please tick yes or no	Is there an impact? What kind of equality impact may there be? Is the impact positive or adverse or is there a potential for both? If the impact is neutral please give a reason.	What evidence do you have to support this? E.g equality monitoring data, consultation results, customer satisfaction information etc Please add a narrative to justify your claims around impacts and describe the analysis and interpretation of evidence to support your conclusion as this will inform members decision making, include consultation results/satisfaction information/equality monitoring data
8. Disability Equality – this can include physical, mental health, learning or sensory disabilities and includes conditions such as dementia as well as hearing or sight impairment.	Y	This support will have a positive impact to this characteristic group.	The financial hardship needs analysis identified that households with disabilities are at far higher risk of poverty than non-disabled households particularly in the working age

				<p>where poverty rates are double for those that are disabled.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1617 244 2134 387"> <thead> <tr> <th>Poverty Rates</th> <th>Child</th> <th>Working age</th> <th>Pension age</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Disabled</td> <td>32%</td> <td>38%</td> <td>24%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not Disabled</td> <td>30%</td> <td>17%</td> <td>17%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>In Q1 of the 2022/2023 year 51% of individuals accessing citizens advice for support had a disability or long-term health condition.</p> <p>The financial hardship action plan has specific actions to address financial hardship in disabled households. Not only are there actions targeted to households with disabilities but also to address financial hardship as a whole and therefore will apply to disabled households.</p>	Poverty Rates	Child	Working age	Pension age	Disabled	32%	38%	24%	Not Disabled	30%	17%	17%
Poverty Rates	Child	Working age	Pension age													
Disabled	32%	38%	24%													
Not Disabled	30%	17%	17%													
<p>9. Racial equality</p>	<p>Y</p>		<p>This support will have a positive impact to this characteristic group.</p>	<p>The financial hardship needs analysis identified that residents from ethnic minority groups are at higher risk of experiencing poverty compared to white individuals. The poverty rate for ethnic minority groups is 38% compared with white individuals at 19%. Specific groups are more affected, for example poverty rates are over 50% in Pakistani and Bangladeshi households.</p> <p>Minority ethnic groups saw a greater impact during the pandemic. During July to September 2020 the UK unemployment rate (ONS Data) was 4.4% for people from a white ethnic background and higher 8.5% when compared for people from minority ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p>The universal actions within the financial hardship action plan will help residents from minority ethnic groups as well as having specific actions aimed at supporting residents from ethnic minority groups particularly from Pakistani and Bangladeshi households who,</p>												

				data shows, are more affected by the impacts of financial hardship.								
10. Gender equality	Y		This support will have a positive impact to this characteristic group.	The needs analysis identified that unemployment rates in Bracknell Forest unemployment were higher in working age males than females. However, females are more likely to be in part time work due and bear greater responsibility to childcare. The Q1 of the citizens advice monitoring report showed that 63% of residents coming for advice were female.								
11. Sexual orientation equality		N	Neutral	There is no anticipated impact to this characteristic.								
12. Gender re-assignment		N	Neutral	There is no anticipated impact to this characteristic.								
13. Age equality	Y		This support will have a positive impact to this characteristic group.	<p>The Joseph Rowntree Foundation published statistics on poverty rates across age groups. Poverty rates are highest in families with children aged 0-4 and lowest in pensioners.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Child</th> <th>Working age</th> <th>Pension age</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Poverty Rates</td> <td>31%</td> <td>20%</td> <td>18%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>A large number of actions within the action plan are universal to all age groups however there are also specific actions towards each age group where gaps have been identified using data and local analysis. Actions are also in place to ensure communications reach all residents.</p>		Child	Working age	Pension age	Poverty Rates	31%	20%	18%
	Child	Working age	Pension age									
Poverty Rates	31%	20%	18%									
14. Religion and belief equality		N		There is no anticipated impact to this characteristic.								

15. Pregnancy and maternity equality		N		There is no anticipated impact to this characteristic.
16. Marriage and civil partnership equality		N		There is no anticipated impact to this characteristic.
17. Please give details of any other potential impacts on any other group (e.g. those on lower incomes/carers/ex-offenders, armed forces communities) and on promoting good community relations.	<p>The action plan aims to support residents experiencing financial hardship, regardless of any other characteristics. The financial hardship needs analysis also identified that carers are a cohort that are at higher risk of hardship and are more likely to be unemployed due to needing to find work that fits around their caring responsibilities. Therefore, the actions within the plan will have a positive impact on this group.</p> <p>Actions have also been identified to target individuals joining the housing register and/ or are homeless as these residents are typically low income. Therefore, the actions within the action plan will have a positive impact on this group.</p>			
18. If an adverse/negative impact has been identified can it be justified on grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group or for any other reason?	No adverse or negative impacts have been identified as this plan seeks to minimise the effects of low income across all relevant groups. Though it is recognised that resources are limited and therefore these are prioritised to those identified as facing the greatest hardship.			
19. If there is any difference in the impact of the activity when considered for each of the equality groups listed in 8 – 14 above; how significant is the difference in terms of its nature and the number of people likely to be affected?	There are disparities amongst groups identified above who will require more support than others to reduce the effects of financial hardship they are experiencing. The financial hardship action plan will ensure more equity across resident characteristic groups.			
20. Could the impact constitute unlawful discrimination in relation to any of the Equality Duties?		No		
21. What further information or data is required to better understand the impact? Where and how can that information be obtained?	A needs analysis has already been conducted to provide a foundation for the actions. Where possible they include measurable outcomes to understand the uptake. Data will continue to be reviewed to make sure the actions reach the target cohorts.			
22. On the basis of sections 7 – 17 above is a full impact assessment required?		No		A full impact assessment is not required as it has been evidenced above that there are no negative impacts to particular groups within the community and actions have been identified to proactively support those most in need.
23. If a full impact assessment is not required; what actions will you take to reduce or remove any potential differential/adverse impact, to further promote equality of opportunity through this activity or to obtain further information or data? Please complete the action plan in full, adding more rows as needed.				
Action	Timescale	Person Responsible	Milestone/Success Criteria	

Continue to review the actions to ensure they meet the groups of people experiencing the greatest financial hardship.	Ongoing	Claudia Trott	
Collect data to best understand uptake and reach of protected characteristics, where this is proportionate and appropriate to do so. For example as part of local welfare applications.	Ongoing	Sharon Warner/Claudia Trott	
24. Which service, business or work plan will these actions be included in?	Community Engagement CXO Business Plan		
25. Please list the current actions undertaken to advance equality or examples of good practice identified as part of the screening?	Completion of evidence based financial needs analysis. Setting up hardship forum with the VCFS.		
26. Assistant Director/Director signature.	Signature: A Thomas		Date: 15.9.2022

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Initial Equalities Screening Record Form

Date of Screening:	Directorate: People	Section: Early Help and Communities									
1. Activity to be assessed	Household Support Fund Phase 3										
2. What is the activity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Policy/strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Function/procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Service <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational change										
3. Is it a new or existing activity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New <input type="checkbox"/> Existing										
4. Officer responsible for the screening	Claudia Trott										
5. Who are the members of the screening team?	Claudia Trott, Sharon Warner, Katie Flint, Mark Barratt, Harjit Hunjan										
6. What is the purpose of the activity?	<p>Local authorities have been allocated funding by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), to support vulnerable residents. This follows several previous similar funds, however the focus of the funds purpose has moved towards reducing the impact of the rising cost of living. It must be used to cover costs associated with of food, energy (heating, cooking, lighting) and other essentials. The current phase of funding must be used between 01 October 2022 and 31 March 2023.</p> <p>Local authorities are responsible for how the funding is distributed and have been given significant discretion for setting up the support and determining eligibility. Any funding not spent by the end of the period must be returned to the Department for Work and Pensions.</p>										
7. Who is the activity designed to benefit/target?	Vulnerable households in financial hardship and those adversely affected by the cost of living crisis.										
Protected Characteristics	Please tick yes or no	Is there an impact? What kind of equality impact may there be? Is the impact positive or adverse or is there a potential for both? If the impact is neutral please give a reason.	What evidence do you have to support this? E.g equality monitoring data, consultation results, customer satisfaction information etc Please add a narrative to justify your claims around impacts and describe the analysis and interpretation of evidence to support your conclusion as this will inform members decision making, include consultation results/satisfaction information/equality monitoring data								
8. Disability Equality – this can include physical, mental health, learning or sensory disabilities and includes conditions such as dementia as well as hearing or sight impairment.	Y	This support will have a positive impact to this characteristic group.	The financial hardship needs analysis identified that households with disabilities are at far higher risk of poverty than non-disabled households particularly in the working age where poverty rates are double for those that are disabled. <table border="1" style="margin-top: 10px; width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Poverty Rates</th> <th>Child</th> <th>Working age</th> <th>Pension age</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Disabled</td> <td style="text-align: center;">32%</td> <td style="text-align: center;">38%</td> <td style="text-align: center;">24%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Poverty Rates	Child	Working age	Pension age	Disabled	32%	38%	24%
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			<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Not Disabled</td> <td>30%</td> <td>17%</td> <td>17%</td> </tr> </table> <p>In Q1 of the 2022/2023 year, 51% of individuals accessing citizens advice for support had a disability or long-term health condition.</p> <p>The Household Support Fund seeks to alleviate some of this hardship.</p> <p>Disabled residents in receipt of low income may be considered eligible linked to the benefits they receive or the wider vulnerability to financial hardship.</p> <p>Children with SEND will also be eligible to apply for support from this funding if the family qualify as low income.</p>	Not Disabled	30%	17%	17%
Not Disabled	30%	17%	17%				
9. Racial equality	Y	This support will have a positive impact to this characteristic group.	<p>The financial hardship needs analysis identified that residents from ethnic minority groups are at higher risk of experiencing poverty compared to white individuals. The poverty rate for ethnic minority groups is 38% compared with white individuals at 19%. Specific groups are more affected, for example poverty rates are over 50% in Pakistani and Bangladeshi households.</p> <p>Minority ethnic groups saw a greater impact during the pandemic. During July to September 2020 the UK unemployment rate (ONS Data) was 4.4% for people from a white ethnic background and higher 8.5% when compared for people from minority ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p>Resident from ethnic minority groups in receipt of low income may be considered eligible linked to the benefits they receive or the wider vulnerability to financial hardship.</p>				
10. Gender equality	Y	This support will have a positive impact to this characteristic group.	<p>The needs analysis identified that unemployment rates in Bracknell Forest unemployment were higher in working age males than females. However, females are more likely to be in part time work due and bear greater responsibility to childcare. The Q1 of the citizens advice monitoring report showed that 63% of residents coming for advice were female.</p>				

				Residents in receipt of low income may be considered eligible linked to the benefits they receive or the wider vulnerability to financial hardship.								
11. Sexual orientation equality		N	Neutral	There is no anticipated impact to this characteristic.								
12. Gender re-assignment		N	Neutral	There is no anticipated impact to this characteristic.								
13. Age equality	Y		This support will have a positive impact to this characteristic group.	<p>The Joseph Rowntree Foundation published statistics on poverty rates across age groups. Poverty rates are highest in families with children aged 0-4 and lowest in pensioners.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Child</th> <th>Working age</th> <th>Pension age</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Poverty Rates</td> <td>31%</td> <td>20%</td> <td>18%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Aspects of the distribution of the funding will directly support families with children where poverty rates are highest. Including through the distribution of supermarket vouchers to eligible school children. Other households will be able to apply for support if in receipt of eligible benefits.</p>		Child	Working age	Pension age	Poverty Rates	31%	20%	18%
	Child	Working age	Pension age									
Poverty Rates	31%	20%	18%									
14. Religion and belief equality		N	Neutral	There is no anticipated impact to this characteristic.								
15. Pregnancy and maternity equality		N	Neutral	There is no anticipated impact to this characteristic.								
16. Marriage and civil partnership equality		N	Neutral	There is no anticipated impact to this characteristic.								
17. Please give details of any other potential impacts on any other group (e.g. those on lower incomes/carers/ex-	This scheme is primarily targeted at cohorts with low or no income including those who are not receiving additional support from the cost-of-living payment. The needs analysis identified that those with caring responsibilities are more likely to be in receipt of low income, so this group are also likely to benefit.											

offenders, armed forces communities) and on promoting good community relations.			
18. If an adverse/negative impact has been identified can it be justified on grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group or for any other reason?		No adverse or negative impacts have been identified. Even if a household does not automatically qualify for the target support, they can apply through the local welfare scheme, with their eligibility assessed.	
19. If there is any difference in the impact of the activity when considered for each of the equality groups listed in 8 – 14 above; how significant is the difference in terms of its nature and the number of people likely to be affected?		The scheme is likely to positively impact hundreds of households across the borough who are in financial hardship. It is estimated that around 2,500 pupils will receive support for food during the holidays. It is estimated that a further 1,500 households across the borough will receive financial support through the scheme.	
20. Could the impact constitute unlawful discrimination in relation to any of the Equality Duties?			No
21. What further information or data is required to better understand the impact? Where and how can that information be obtained?		The council is required to monitor and report to the DWP how the funding is allocated and spent. The distribution mechanisms for the previous iterations of this fund have also been reviewed as part of the phase three plans, to better understand the vulnerable cohorts.	
22. On the basis of sections 7 – 17 above is a full impact assessment required?			No A full impact assessment is not required as it has been evidenced above that there are no negative impacts to particular groups within the community.
23. If a full impact assessment is not required; what actions will you take to reduce or remove any potential differential/adverse impact, to further promote equality of opportunity through this activity or to obtain further information or data? Please complete the action plan in full, adding more rows as needed.			
Action	Timescale	Person Responsible	Milestone/Success Criteria
Promotion of the application route through the community engagement team and wider networks to increase awareness amongst seldom heard communities to apply if relevant.	December 2022	Harjit Hunjan	
Continue to review the uptake of targeted support and application base routes, to adapt processes as needed.	November-March 2022	Sharon Warner	
Promotion of the application route through the links within the voluntary community and faith sector and support those with the application process.	December 2022	Claudia Trott	

<p>24. Which service, business or work plan will these actions be included in?</p>	<p>Financial hardship Action Plan. Financial Hardship Officer Group and Members Welfare Steering Group</p>
<p>25. Please list the current actions undertaken to advance equality or examples of good practice identified as part of the screening?</p>	<p>Considered previous distribution of funding and other recent government funding. Local needs analysis information to identify a range of cohorts. Mapped other support/funding currently available to cohorts including through the Discretionary Energy Rebate Scheme. Gathered information on how other authorities have previously spent the funding and plans for the current phase. Attended DWP information sessions to understand purpose and scope of funding.</p>
<p>26. Assistant Director/Director signature.</p>	<p>Signature:  Date: 28/09/2022</p>

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TO: THE EXECUTIVE
DATE: 18 OCTOBER 2022

Revenue Budget Update
(Executive Director: Resources)

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Recognising the scale of the financial pressures the Council is currently facing due to inflation and service demand, this report provides an update to the Executive on the Council's financial situation in the current year and a forward look to the potential financial position in future years. It also highlights a number of key pressures that, if not responded to quickly, are likely to present further financial difficulties in the period ahead.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive:

- 2.1 **Notes the identified best-case and worst-case scenarios for the Council's current year financial position summarised in Table 1 and detailed in Annex A;**
- 2.2 **Approves drawing the full £1.5m from the earmarked reserve for Inflationary Costs to support the current year's budget, as proposed in paragraph 5.3;**
- 2.3 **Endorses the actions agreed by the Corporate Management Team to help contain expenditure in the current year as set out under paragraph 5.5;**
- 2.4 **Supports the proposed responses to immediate budget priorities set out in the report and specifically:**
- a) **approves drawings from reserves to meet time-limited costs proposed for core foster care allowances (£0.154m in 2022/23, paragraph 5.10), social worker recruitment and retention subject to detailed review by the Employment Committee (£0.190m, paragraph 5.15) and SEND support service staffing (£0.271m + £0.197m + £0.022m, paragraphs 5.25, 5.27 and 5.28); and**
 - b) **approves inclusion in the Commitment Budget 2023/24 funding of £0.371m for core foster care allowances (paragraph 5.10), additional funding and associated savings of £0.115m and -£0.179m respectively related to the enhanced foster care approach, £0.456m for social worker recruitment and retention proposals (paragraph 5.15) and £0.052m for SEND support service staffing (paragraph 5.28);**
- 2.5 **Notes the Council's predicted medium-term financial prospects detailed in paragraphs 5.29 to 5.53 and summarised in Table 3;**
- 2.6 **Reaffirms its support for the 7 key principles to guide budget preparations set out under paragraph 5.54.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The recommendations are intended to ensure that the Executive is aware of the Council's current and predicted future financial position.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Executive could choose not to support expenditure on the proposed priority areas. This is not recommended as the measures proposed are viewed as preventing more significant cost increases in the period ahead.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Current Year Financial Position

- 5.1 The Council approved the current year's budget and council tax at its in-person meeting on 24 February 2022. Consideration at the time was given to the outlook for the economy as a whole, the impact of demographic changes and the resulting pressures on services and other risks contained within the proposed budget. The Contingency was set at £1.9m in the final budget proposals, to make an allowance for the identified risks. With the budget including almost £8m of service pressures and over £4m to cover the predicted impact of inflation, the 2022/23 original budget was felt to be realistic and manageable.
- 5.2 Early budget monitoring reports re-affirmed this feeling. Based on the first departmental returns using actuals to the end of May, an overall underspend of between £0.7m and £1.9m was predicted, although it was noted that pay and price inflation was an emerging risk to this position. Recognising this, the Executive Director: Resources had established a new earmarked reserve of £1.5m in the 2021/22 accounts closedown, specifically to cover rising inflationary costs.
- 5.3 By the next monitoring return, based on actual expenditure and income to the end of June, the position had deteriorated by £1.1m. The most recent monitoring information presented to the Corporate Management Team on 21 September is summarised in Table 1 below and shows a further deterioration of between £0.25m and £0.4m, indicating a predicted overspend after allowing for the corporate contingency of up to £0.843m (worst case). This, however, excludes the impact of an increased national pay award above the 2% budgeted, with a flat rate increase of £1,925 (equivalent to 5.4% for Bracknell Forest, £1.8m above the sum allowed for) having been proposed but not agreed. It is most likely that this will be rejected by unions and potentially be increased further. Against this backdrop, it is recommended that the full £1.5m earmarked reserve set aside for Inflationary Costs is drawn down to increase the overall budget for the year. Even with this included, the predicted position indicates that an overspend in the current year is a realistic outcome.

Unrestricted

Table 1: Latest Predicted 2022/23 Budget Out-turn

	Current Approved Budget £000	Predicted Variance Best Case £000	Predicted Variance Worst Case £000
Central Directorates	16,740	358	762
Delivery Directorate	17,367	971	1,324
People Directorate	61,958	807	1,531
Non-Departmental	-16,536	-941	-941
Sub-Total	79,529	1,195	2,676
Contingency	1,833	-1,833	-1,833
Sub-Total - Approved Budget	81,362	-638	843
Unbudgeted Pay Award (minimum)	0	1,800	1,800
Inflation Reserve	1,500	-1,500	-1,500
Overall Position	82,862	-338	1,143

5.4 Information about the variances being reported against approved budgets is included in the detailed budget monitoring report attached as Annex A to this report.

5.5 Having considered this position, the Corporate Management Team at its meeting on 21 September agreed the following mitigating actions to help ensure a balanced position by the end of the year:

- The Chief Executive will write to all staff, explaining the current budget position caused primarily by inflationary pressures affecting the whole economy, and setting out the measures below;
 - a. With immediate effect, all non-essential purchases should cease;
 - b. The scope to use remaining resources to manage any current or new vacancies either permanently or for a temporary period should be fully explored before new appointments are made, to minimise the need for compulsory redundancies to balance the budget in the period ahead;
 - c. With immediate effect, any proposed new recruitment requires Assistant Director or Executive Director approval;
 - d. The position will be kept under close review in the months ahead and a formal in-year emergency budget will be instigated if the predicted year end position continues to materially deteriorate.

5.6 The Executive is asked to support these measures.

Immediate Budget Priorities

5.7 Despite the difficult position the Council is facing financially, as set out above and in the forward look section that follows, there are some service and financial risks being faced that are likely to be exacerbated in the months ahead if they are not responded to quickly. These are set out below with the request that the Executive agrees to support the identified additional expenditure from 1 November 2022 to 31 March 2023, funded by drawing from reserves given the current year's budget position, with the on-going impact included in the Commitment Budget for 2023/24.

a) *Foster Carer Allowances*

- 5.8 Within the Council's Business Change Programme is a project to review the approach to supporting children looked after. The aim of the Placements is to: "Improve local placement range and stability for children, by reducing Bracknell Forest Council's dependency on external placements and improving recruitment and retention of foster carers within the Borough."
- 5.9 Without in-house foster carers, the Council has to rely on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and residential placements with external providers. These placements are typically very costly, and most importantly, can lead to disruption for children being placed further away from home. Benchmarking analysis demonstrates that Bracknell Forest Council does not currently have a competitive offer in place for our foster carers, when compared against neighbouring local authorities. This creates a significant risk in relation to recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers and an increased need for alternative placement types.
- 5.10 Allowances for Bracknell Forest foster carers have therefore been reviewed and it is proposed that they be increased from 1 November 2022, to help ensure that we can continue to recruit and retain high-quality, local foster carers. The proposed new allowance structure consists of an uplift to the average weekly allowance for all foster carers, a new annual allowance for birthdays and celebrations, an annual retention payment and two weeks' paid respite. This is to be supplemented with a targeted weekly skills payment and additional funding for recruitment and marketing. Details of these elements are set out in Appendix A and will cost an additional £0.371m in a full year, with the cost in 2022/23, assuming implementation on 1 November 2022, of £0.154m.
- 5.11 It is also proposed to introduce an "enhanced foster care" scheme, initially focused on a six-month pilot, with the expectation that it will be expanded if successful using an "invest to save" approach. The proposal is to supplement the "core" allowances with additional weekly skills and complexity payments, where very experienced and skilled foster carers are able to support children who would otherwise require independent placements. The pilot involves "stepping down" two children from residential care placements into local in-house "enhanced" foster carers, who will also be supported by an additional part-time Social Worker. The additional costs of the approach will be £0.061m in the current year and £0.093m in 2023/24, more than offset by the associated reductions in the residential care budget (£0.115m and £0.179m respectively). With both children turning 18 in Spring 2024, the pilot savings and costs will reverse in 2024/25 but may be replaced by other similar enhanced fostering arrangements, should these be appropriate for the child and cost beneficial.

b) *Social Worker Recruitment and Retention*

- 5.12 A project team established early in 2022 comprising HR&OD specialists and representatives from Adults and Childrens' Social Care has explored the current market factors and comparative salaries (locally and nationally) for social care staff. This followed long-standing difficulties in recruiting and retaining these specialist staff, which has been a key factor in the need to engage agency workers to cover vacancies in the agreed establishment. These challenges are being faced by many service areas, leading to the cost of agency workers across the Council totalling £5.7m in 2021/22, a significant proportion of which have been covering statutory social care roles in the People Directorate.

- 5.13 The insights and data gathered provided a solid base from which to understand the risks of not acting at this crucial time with the significant challenges we face in implementing forthcoming policy and legislation changes, most notably in Adult Social Care, which will add to existing staffing pressures. Given the forthcoming challenges in this area, there is every expectation that other local authorities will be reviewing their pay arrangements for these staff.
- 5.14 There is currently a pay differential between the social work workforce in adults and children’s services. Currently, the majority of social workers in children’s services benefit from market premia or annual retention payments. It has previously not been felt essential to introduce such measures for staff working in adult services, where the market has not been so competitive. This is already changing and further changes enhancements are expected due to a limited supply market and increased demand for such staff to fulfil the requirements of the Government’s charging reforms.
- 5.15 From the evidence gathered through the review, there was a justification to increase the base salary level for social workers generally. Due to the current pay differentials between the adult social work workforce and parts of children’s social work, the recommendations proposed are likely to impact more positively in adult social care. The Council’s Constitution states that any decision to change pay arrangements for large areas of the Council’s workforce rests with the Employment Committee. However, the scale of the financial impact is such that the Executive is being asked to support the proposals in principle and approve the necessary funding should it be required in advance of their being considered by the Committee. This totals £0.456m in a full year, £0.190m in the current year assuming implementation from 1 November 2022.
- 5.16 These costs reflect an expected reduction in the number of agency workers employed by Adult Social Care, due to the enhanced package for “on-payroll” staff. The anticipated reductions are as set out in the table below. There are currently concerns in Children’s Social Care that there is not currently a local market for permanent staff that can be tapped into, which will be reviewed further. At this stage the proposed changes are therefore predominantly aimed at retaining existing staff.

Table 2: Anticipated Reduction in Agency Staff from Social Care Proposals

	Posts currently covered by agency	Potential reduction	Reduction (%)
Adult Social Care	9.1	4.5	49%
Mental Health Services	12.2	4	38%

- 5.17 In summary, the proposed new pay and grading scheme for all social workers is based around 3 career pathways. This demarcates roles from early career up to leadership and management level positions and outlines the growth opportunities within each pathway. This will provide:
- a) new generic job descriptions for social work roles that align to the current and future agenda for social care, ensuring consistency between adult and children’s services;
 - b) increased base salary levels;
 - c) flatter pay structure to encourage career development and movement within the pathways from early career to leadership and management roles to grow and retain talent;
 - d) aligned training and career development including apprenticeships to each role within the pathways.

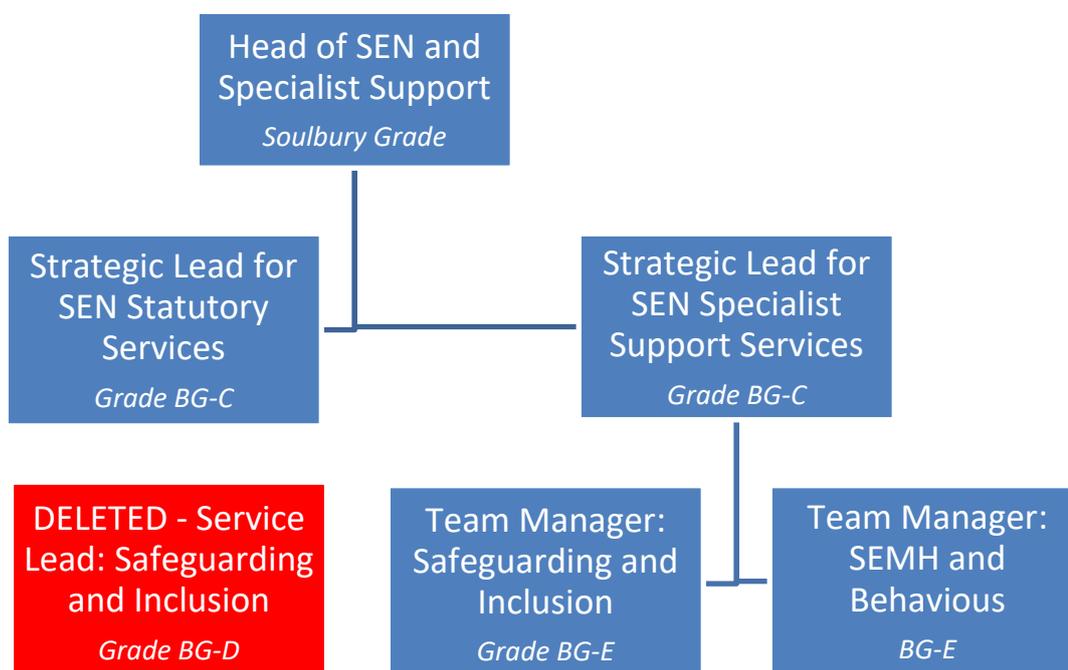
- 5.18 If implemented, the proposals will remove the requirement for most market premium payments (except at Head of Service level) and replace them with higher substantive salaries. There will continue to be a requirement in children's services to maintain annual retention payments, albeit at lower levels than currently, to ensure there is no detriment in the total reward package. Comparisons of current and proposed revised pay and benefit levels are attached as Appendix B.
- 5.19 In terms of comparators, the proposals for the adult workforce will place social workers and occupational therapists at the top of current pay levels in the surrounding areas. However, as Bracknell Forest is the first Council to review pay arrangements for these workers, it is unlikely that this will be the case for long.
- 5.20 Full details of the analysis and proposals will be presented to the Employment Committee for detailed consideration. The funding request which the Executive is asked to support in principle is conditional upon the Committee supporting the proposed approach.

c) Education Support Service (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities service) Staffing

- 5.21 The structure of the SEND team was changed in February 2019 to include a single Head of Children's Support Services, with a broad agenda to cover and a large number of service managers to support. The structure was being reviewed at the time of the Ofsted and CQC Inspections, with a belief that there was insufficient leadership capacity to drive forward the SEND agenda alongside broader responsibilities such as safeguarding, inclusion, behaviour, SEMH and specialist teaching.
- 5.22 The inspection feedback supports the need for greater accountability and leadership "grip" within the Education and Learning team, particularly with a focus on SEND. It also highlights a lack of capacity in the team generally, most critically at this time when significant improvements are required to the service from both customer and financial perspectives. A new structure is therefore being proposed to address these concerns, to provide a service that is fit for purpose and capable of delivering on the significant improvements required.
- 5.23 The proposed structure is being brought forward for consideration in the context of the Government's intention to implement major educational reforms between 2024 and 2030. The Schools Bill and the SEND Green Paper 2022 outline the detail of these intentions.
- The Schools Bill makes provision for the regulation of Academies; about school and local education funding; the attendance of children at school; the regulation of independent educational institutions; teacher misconduct; and for connected purposes. The Bill was due for its 3rd reading in the House of Lords on 14 September 2022, but this has been delayed.
 - The SEND Green Paper – 'SEND review: right support, right place, right time', sets out the Government's proposals for a system that offers children and young people the opportunity to thrive, have access to the right support, in the right place, and at the right time, so they can fulfil their potential and lead happy, healthy and productive adult lives.
- 5.24 Given these forthcoming changes, the recommendation is to implement a fixed time, interim structure, to provide stability and robustness over the next two years and enable a focus on delivering the improvements required in response to the Ofsted

inspection and Written Statement of Action. A further review of the structure would then be undertaken early in 2024 when the details of the educational reforms are known.

- 5.25 At a leadership level, it is proposed to re-instate the currently vacant Head of SEN and Specialist Support Services role for a fixed term of two years. This post would be supported by two Strategic Lead posts, covering SEN Statutory Services and SEN Specialist Support Services. In a change to the current interim arrangements and reflecting the higher-level post above them, these posts would be downgraded to Bracknell Grade C. After consideration and feedback from service users, the current Service Lead BG-D post that covers both Safeguarding and Inclusion will be deleted and its responsibilities split into two BG-E roles, reporting into the Strategic Lead for Specialist Services. The senior level structure will therefore look as follows, with an additional cost over two years to be funded from reserves totalling £0.271m.



- 5.26 In addition to the proposed time-limited changes to the leadership structure, additional operational posts are required to address the weaknesses and gaps identified by the inspections. Four new posts have been identified, three time-limited and one highlighted as an on-going requirement.
- 5.27 It is proposed to appoint a Business Manager (BG-F) on a fixed one year contract to focus on embedding the practice and culture change requirements of the necessary service improvements. This will include supporting the development and implementation of SEN data and associated finance systems to ensure processes and streamlined and fit for purpose. In addition, a SEND Engagement Officer and part time Participation Officer are proposed for two-year fixed term periods (both BG-G), to improve customer engagement and ensure the voice of the child is captured and represented in service design and delivery. These time limited posts will cost £0.197m over the next two years, to be funded from one-off reserves.
- 5.28 A permanent Pathway for Adulthood Officer (BG-F) will address specific feedback from Ofsted that there is a lack of future aspiration and appropriate placements for children as they approach adulthood. This has led to relatively high numbers of young people with SEND who are classed as Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET). This re-introduces a post that existed and was well-regarded in a

previous structure with an on-going full year cost of £0.052m from April 2023. Part year costs of £0.022m will also be incurred in the current year, assuming 1 November appointment, to be funded from one-off reserves.

Medium-Term Prospects

5.29 Key factors in projecting the Council's medium-term financial position are:

- The level of general grant support to be provided by Central Government, which is affected by the overall level of funding available for Local Government and the funding system used to distribute this;
- Specific grants received for current and new responsibilities;
- New spending pressures and inflationary increases that are added to the base (commitment) budget each year;
- Savings that can be identified and implemented to mitigate additional cost pressures;
- Annual council tax increases within the levels allowed by Government and the number of new properties in the Borough paying Council Tax;
- Levels of reserves available to support the budget, recognising that these are one-off in nature.

5.30 The sections below set out current assumptions for each of these factors, based on the information known at this time. With the current local government finance settlement applying only to the current year and not beyond, there is inevitably a large degree of uncertainty in the planning assumptions that will only be removed when the 2023/24 provisional finance settlement is announced, most likely in mid-December.

Government Grant Support

5.31 Funding levels for local government overall up to 2024/25 were published as part of the Government's 2021 Spending Review. Other than planned increases in funding for Adult Social Care reforms, grant funding over the period is broadly flat. With the sector, alongside all residents and businesses, facing significant financial pressures from inflationary cost increases this would clearly represent a material reduction in real terms funding. At this time, however, there are no signs that Government is minded to provide additional funding for the public sector in 2023/24.

5.32 In terms of the local government funding system, it seems very unlikely that any changes will be introduced next year arising from the long-term Fair Funding and Business Rate Retention System reviews. However, there will be a business rate revaluation impacting in April 2023. This will introduce changes to the amounts of business rates collectable in individual areas, which are typically matched by compensating adjustments to grant funding to ensure no impact (at least immediately) on local authorities' resources.

5.33 Alongside this, the Government has indicated its intent to move a number of hereditaments, notably large scale telecommunications networks, onto its Central List from local lists. Members will be aware of the significant impact of this on Bracknell Forest, which has been anticipated and planned for for some time. The Executive Director: Resources has engaged positively with officials around this change and engaged specialist external advice to put forward options for consideration that would mitigate the impact of this transfer as far as possible. Having issued an informal discussion paper with affected local authorities in August, the Government issued a formal consultation on 2 September with responses required by 30 September. In simple terms, the proposal is to treat transfers to the Central List in the same way as

other changes from the wider revaluation. This would be a better outcome than we could reasonably have hoped for, as it will broadly protect the Council's income levels. Officers will therefore be writing in support of the consultation proposal.

- 5.34 Based on this information, it is assumed that there will be no change to the Council's baseline funding including business rate retention between 2022/23 and 2023/24. Previous assumptions had included a reduction of around £4m due to business rate changes.
- 5.35 There are other less significant but still important specific grants that the Council is receiving in 2022/23, notably the long-standing New Homes Bonus (£2.3m income) and the Services Grant (£1.2m income) introduced in 2022/23. With the Government still not having issued a formal response to the 2021 consultation on NHB, which rewards local authorities for housing growth, it is assumed that this will remain broadly as in the current year, although a reduction of around £0.3m is likely since the current year's figure reflected a year of unprecedented housing growth in the Borough. It is possible that the Services Grant could remain the same as in the current year, although should Ministers wish to redistribute funding across the country this would be the obvious vehicle to use. While the future of the levelling up agenda under a new Prime Minister is not yet clear, there is a risk that at least some of this grant could be transferred from the South East to other parts of the country. A 50% reduction in Bracknell Forest's allocation has therefore been assumed for planning purposes.
- 5.36 The most significant funding and service issue in 2023/24 relates to the introduction of the Adult Social Care reforms, including the cap on individual client contributions and the "fair cost of care" arrangements. There are great concerns amongst local authorities across the country around the impact of these reforms, most particularly in the south of England which has a much higher proportion of "self-funders" who will benefit from the cap in their contributions towards the costs of their care, after which the funding responsibility passes to their local authority. Modelling of the potential financial impact has been undertaken by many authorities, including Bracknell Forest, which indicates that the cost impact could well be many times the level of grant funding that has been earmarked nationally. At this stage there remain very high levels of uncertainty around the actual impact and it is possible that fundamental changes may be made to the approach and timing of the reforms. For that reason, our working financial assumption, which is shared amongst our neighbouring authorities, is that the costs will broadly match the level of grant funding we will receive. A rough estimate, based on how other grants for adult social care have been distributed in recent years, is that additional income and additional costs will total around £1.7m. This assumption will be kept under close review as and when further details of the reforms are announced by the Government in the months ahead.

Inflation, Pressures and Savings

- 5.37 The budget preparations for 2023/24 are being undertaken against the backdrop of the highest inflation rates the country has seen for thirty years. It is therefore inevitable that the allowance for inflation will need to be significantly higher than our typical provision of £2m - £3m, which rose to £4.4m in the 2022/23 budget. This figure included an allowance of 2% for the current year's pay award.
- 5.38 As highlighted in paragraph 5.3 above, the national employers body has this year offered a flat rate £1,925 increase for local government workers. For Bracknell Forest, this equates to an average increase of 5.4%, equivalent to £1.8m above the available budget. The impact of the final approved pay award (which may be higher

as it has not yet been accepted by the major unions) will need to be reflected in the 2023/24 inflation provision, in addition to an allowance for next year's pay offer. While many economic commentators are predicting that the current inflation rate is likely to fall quickly, it is highly likely that it will remain well above levels in recent years for the next twelve months. It is therefore proposed at this stage to allow for pay awards totalling 9.5% across this year and next, an additional 7.5% above the level currently budgeted for, equating to £3.8m.

- 5.39 The same figure of 7.5% is proposed at this time for inflation on non-pay costs, with the exception of electricity and gas which are covered in the paragraph below. This represents an additional cost of service delivery of £6.1m. There is a risk that this may not be sufficient to cover full contractual price rises, many of which are based on the inflation rate at a specific point in the year. Should that be the case, officers will need to identify options to contain expenditure within the approved budgets at their disposal. Members will be made aware in advance if this will have a material impact on front line service levels.
- 5.40 It is widely known that energy prices will increase significantly faster than the headline inflation rate. Increases in electricity prices of 150% and gas prices of 350% are likely. The Council has arrangements in place to forward purchase these commodities and around 50% of the predicted energy required in 2023/24 has been secured to date. This allows the impact of energy inflation to be estimated with a reasonable degree of accuracy, even at this early stage in the budget preparations. It is proposed to allow a reasonably prudent figure of £2.5m for planning purposes, an average increase of 166%, a blended rate that recognises 84% of the Council's energy budgets are for electricity. It is possible that this figure may reduce as further forward purchases are made.
- 5.41 Recognising the impact of these inflationary increases on the Council's costs, it is proposed that our fees and charges also work towards average increases of 7.5%, which would generate additional income of £1.9m. As always, there will be some service areas where charges are market driven and this level of increase is not sustainable. Individual service areas will need to make this assessment in calculating fees and charges for Members to consider as part of developing the Council's draft budget proposals that will be published in December.
- 5.43 In addition to additional inflationary costs, the Council's budget is affected each year by other cost pressures, notably relating to increased demand for services. It is too early at this stage of the budget process to accurately predict the scale of these for 2023/24. However, Members will recall that pressures in each of the last two years have totalled around £7.5m.
- 5.44 Although the Council has delivered savings totalling over £100m since it was created in 1998, there is still a requirement to identify and deliver further savings each year to help balance the overall budget, mitigating some of the additional cost pressures. As with the pressures, it is too early at this stage to know what level of savings may be identified for 2023/24. However, the level of savings in each of the past two years has also been consistent, at £2.7m.
- 5.45 Should the changes to Business Rates referred to in 5.32 and 5.33 be confirmed, the level of funding risk the Council has faced for many years will be significantly reduced. This would enable the regular setting aside of funding to protect against that risk to be reversed, freeing up £3.3m of flexibility in the budget that could be used to partly mitigate against the high inflationary pressures.

Council Tax

- 5.46 In publishing the local government finance settlement the Government sets an assumption around the level of Council Tax increase for each local authority as part of its Spending Power calculation. This is always based on the maximum permitted increase being applied, which is normally the position taken by all but a small number of local authorities.
- 5.47 In 2022/23 the permitted general Council Tax increase for upper tier authorities was 2.99%, comprising a 1.99% standard increase and a further 1% Social Care precept. It is unknown whether the current level of inflation will lead Ministers to permit higher council tax increases in 2023/24. At this stage, it is assumed that the same level of increase will be permitted as in 2022/23 and Bracknell Forest Council will apply this. The decision on the actual level of increase will not be taken until February, when the overall shape of the funding settlement and the Council's final budget proposals for the year are known.
- 5.48 In addition to this, the Council will receive additional Council Tax income due to an increase in the number of properties in the Borough. At this stage, this is estimated at £1.0m. The actual figure will be confirmed when the taxbase is agreed in December.

Reserves

- 5.49 The Council has intentionally accumulated a relatively high level of reserves in recent years, planning for a significant loss of Business Rates income from Government changes to the local and central lists, referred to in paragraph 5.33 above. The Future Finding Reserve currently stands at £18.4m and General Reserves at March 2022 were £11.3m, with £0.8m budgeted to be used to support the current year's budget. The recommended minimum level of General Reserves is £4.5m, meaning that in total £26.4m of reserves are currently available to support future year budgets.
- 5.50 In determining the level of reserves to be used in any one year, it is fundamentally important to remember that these resources are one-off. Any use of reserves therefore simply delays the need for on-going savings to be generated to secure a long-term, sustainable financial position. With funding changes expected to be introduced from 2023/24, materially reducing the Council's resources, its medium term financial strategy had previously assumed using reserves of around £6m - £7m to avoid an immediate cliff edge effect arising from the changes. The use of reserves was thereafter planned to gradually reduce in the following years, offering a "glide path" to a future position where on-going resources matched on-going spending.
- 5.51 While the challenge we now expect to face in 2023/24 is different than envisaged, being driven by inflationary cost increases rather than a significant drop in funding, the outline strategy around the planned use of reserves remains valid.
- 5.52 Table 3 below draws together the planning assumptions in paragraphs 5.29 to 5.51 together to give an indication of the future financial prospects. It is particularly important to note that the level of pressures and savings from 2023/24 onwards are included simply for illustrative purposes, informed by figures in previous years' budgets. Actual proposals for 2023/24 will be published as part of the Council's draft budget in December.

Table 3 – Illustrative Medium Term Financial Prospects

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Base Revenue Budget (adjusted for one-offs)	83.7	90.5	103.4	108.6
Commitments	-0.2	0.8	0.5	0.3
Inflation (excluding energy)	4.4	8.0	3.5	3.0
Inflation (electricity and gas)		2.5	-2.0	0.0
Reduction in Contingency (to £1.9m)	-0.4			
Identified / Assumed Future Savings	-2.3	-2.3	-2.3	-2.3
Identified / Assumed Future Pressures (best case)	7.6	5.9	5.2	5.2
Change in Business Rates growth over baseline	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Reverse budgeted transfers to reserves		-3.3		
Increase in Social Care Grants	-1.0			
ASC reforms cost estimate		1.7	2.4	2.4
ASC reforms funding estimate		-1.7	-2.4	-2.4
Fair Cost of Care Grant	-0.2			
Services Grant / reduction (from £1.2m 22/23)	-1.2	0.6		
Use of Specific Reserves for One-Off Pressures	-0.4	0.4		
New Homes Bonus / reduction (from £2.3m 22/23)	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.3
Expenditure	90.5	103.4	108.6	115.1
Grant and Business Rates Baseline	-18.7	-18.7	-18.7	-18.7
Council Tax (+ 2.99%) TBC	-70.7	-72.8	-76.0	-79.2
Collection Fund Surplus (Council Tax)	-0.3			
Use of General / Future Funding Reserves	-0.8	TBD	TBD	TBD
Council Taxbase Growth	0.0	-1.0	-0.9	-0.8
Resources	-90.5	-92.5	-95.6	-98.7
Cumulative Gap (Before Use of Reserves)	-0.0	10.9	13.0	16.4
Annual Gap (Before Use of Reserves)		10.9	2.1	3.4

5.53 In summary, this shows that the Council will need to either reduce pressures or identify further savings to bridge an identified gap of £16.4m over the next three years to 2025/26. While the gap is currently significantly front loaded, the Council is able to use its available reserves to smooth the phasing over time.

5.54 In order to guide work to identify where savings would be achieved, the Executive has previously identified 7 key principles in August 2020, that remain valid:

- We would:
 1. Aspire to excellence in what we do so we can live within our means;
 2. Consolidate the recent growth in social care spending into our financial plans but work towards a small reduction in real terms;
 3. Concentrate on targeted early intervention and preventative activities to reduce future demand for more expensive services;

4. Seek no funding for new service growth unless in exceptional circumstances, apart from a strategic priority around climate change and agreed manifesto commitments;
5. Refocus transformation and other savings programmes and quantify savings “envelopes” for all projects;
6. Expect all service areas to deliver spending reductions throughout the period to bridge the identified budget gap, focusing on but not limiting efforts to restrict areas of limited or manageable public impact;
7. Increase fees and charges as much as reasonably possible every year to maximise income.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The Council is required to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs. As part of those arrangements, it is under a duty to monitor its budgets throughout the financial year and to take appropriate action to deal with any deterioration in the financial position revealed by the regular monitoring.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 The financial implications of this report are included in the supporting information.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 The Council’s budget proposals impact on a wide range of services. Detailed consultation is undertaken on the draft budget proposals when they are published in December each year to provide individuals and groups the opportunity to provide comments.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 The Council’s strategic risk register contains a specific risk highlighting “significant pressures on the Council’s ability to balance its finances whilst maintaining satisfactory service standards”. While this is a long-standing issue, the situation in the current year and future year prospects mean that the risk is particularly difficult to manage at the current time. This paper has been brought to the Executive at this time to ensure there is a shared understanding of the situation and to agree an outline approach to achieving financial sustainability over the medium-term, to help focus more detailed work on specific options over the coming months.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 A detailed consultation will be undertaken on the Councils draft budget proposals for 2023/24 after they are published in December 2022.

Contacts for further information

Stuart McKellar – 01344 352180
Stuart.mckellar@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Arthur Parker – 01344 352158
Arthur.parker@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Calvin Orr – 01455 352125
Calvin.orr@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Budget Monitoring

2022/23 End of Year Projections

From July 2022 Actuals

It is recommended that CMT:

1

Note that the variances reported by directorates indicate expenditure below the approved budget in the Best Case scenario (-£0.638m) and above the budget in the Worst Case (£0.843m), after taking into account the Corporate Contingency £1.833m). This is a deterioration of £0.246m Best Case / £0.396m Worst Case since last month, including a £0.8m reported underspend in treasury budgets. This excludes the impact of the 2022/23 pay award;

2

Note that inflation is a key risk to the budget, particularly the pay award where the initial offer of a £1,925 pay rise equates to a 5.4% increase for Bracknell Forest, approximately £1.8m above the 2% allowance included in the budget. While energy price increases are also potentially significant, no variance has been included at this stage pending further detail of the Government's six month support package for businesses and public bodies being announced;

3

Recognising that there is insufficient headroom in the approved budget to absorb inflationary pressures, approve that the £1.5m Earmarked Reserve for Inflation created as part of the 2021/22 closedown is used to supplement the current approved budget as a one-off measure, noting it is insufficient to cover the impact of the pay award;

4

In response to this position, considers to what extent measures should be put in place to a) limit non-essential expenditure and / or b) proactively seek and implement in year savings;

5

Note the virements being proposed by directorates and the balances remaining on major earmarked reserves;

6

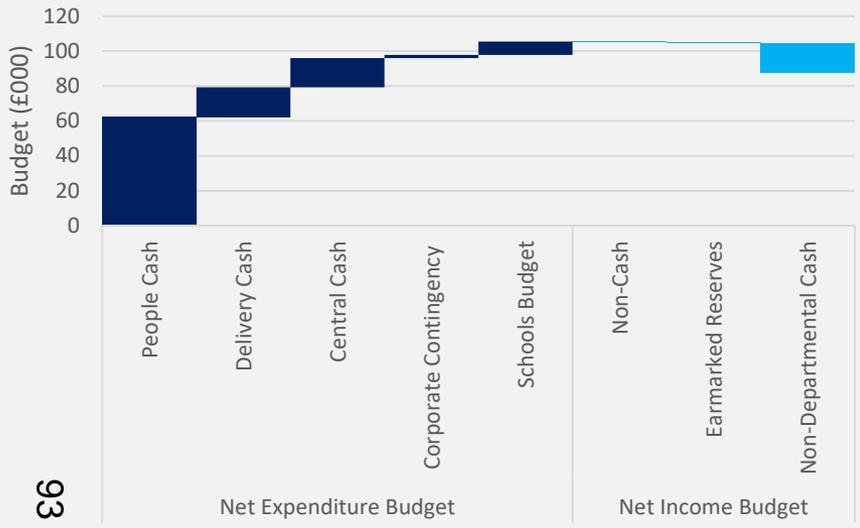
Note that several variances are now being reported on the Schools Budget for the first time indicating an overall variance of £0.489m Best Case and £0.904m Worst Case, in addition to the originally estimated £7.5m in year deficit in the High Needs Block. These are generally work in progress and should therefore be viewed with caution. With the Council being under scrutiny as part of the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme and the current ringfencing of schools block deficits due to end in March 2023, this give cause for significant concern;

7

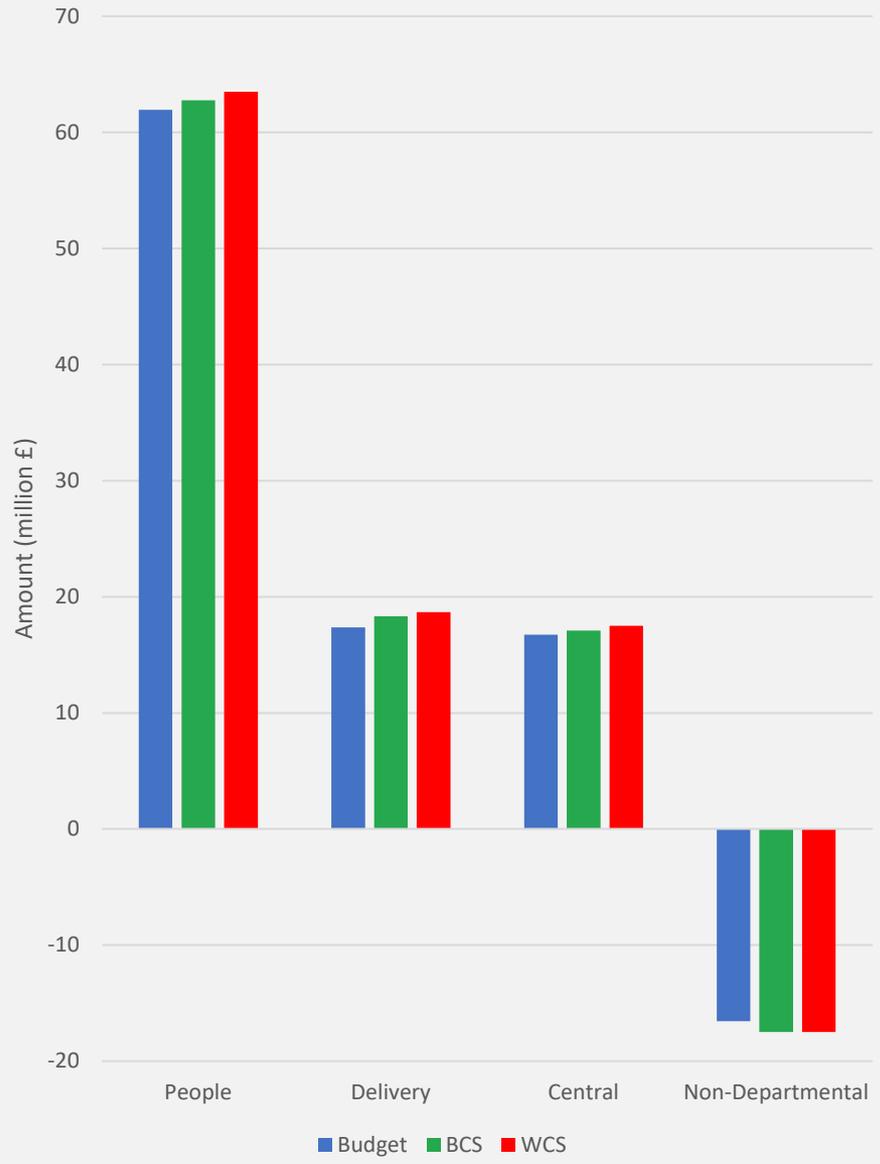
Requests the Executive Director: People to bring a report to CMT in the next month explaining current schools block pressures and identifying proposals to bring the budget back into balance.

Overall Summary

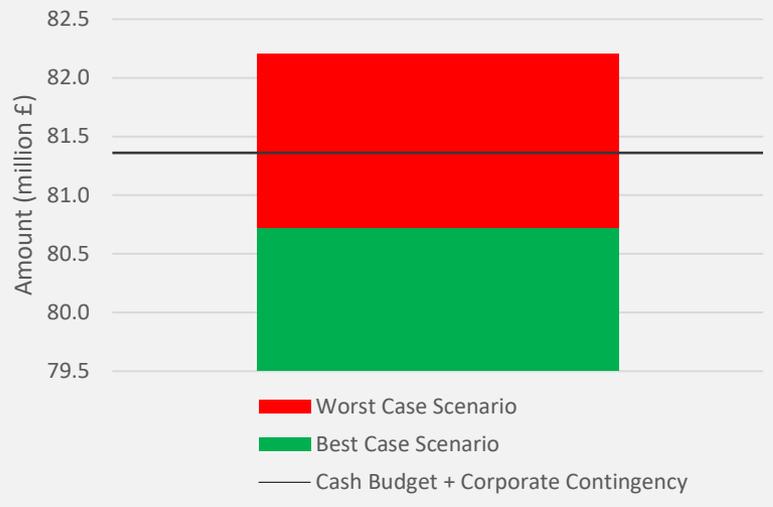
Budget Breakdown



Cash Budgets and Forecasts



Council Forecast Outturn and Budget



Virements

DESCRIPTION	Central (£'000)	Delivery (£'000)	People (£'000)	Non-Departmental (£'000)	Corporate Contingency (£'000)	Contribution to/(from) Earmarked Reserves (£'000)
Previously Reported	1,595	183	732	-528	-67	-1,915
Nothing to report						
TOTAL	1,595	183	732	-528	-67	-1,915

Summary – Assistant Director Level

	Original Cash Budget (£'000)	Virements & Budget C/Fwds (£'000)	Current Approved Cash Budget (£'000)	Variance – BCS (£'000)		Variance – WCS (£'000)	
				Last Month	This Month	Last Month	This Month
Director: Place, Planning & Regeneration	7,397	1,508	8,905	112	247	205	545
Director: Resources	5,969	69	6,038	28	116	94	179
Chief Executive's Office	1,779	18	1,797	-5	-5	34	38
CENTRAL	15,145	1,595	16,740	135	358	333	762
Executive Director of Delivery	219	2	221	0	0	0	0
Assistant Director: Customer Services & ICT	10,741	61	10,802	988	988	1,078	1,078
Assistant Director: Property Services	-5,447	15	-5,432	0	0	0	0
Borough Solicitor	676	9	685	0	0	0	0
Head of Democratic & Registration Services	1,724	80	1,804	0	0	0	0
Assistant Director: Contract Services	9,271	16	9,287	-17	-17	246	246
DELIVERY	17,184	183	17,367	971	971	1,324	1,324
Executive Director of People	1,617	12	1,629	-14	-13	-14	-13
Education and Learning	2,150	113	2,263	11	244	11	244
Children's Social Care	19,489	122	19,611	-1,730	-1,197	-1,400	-923
Contribution to Costs from Schools Budget	-468	0	-468	0	0	0	0
Commissioning	3,220	-34	3,186	81	97	81	97
Adult Social Care	19,992	87	20,079	584	599	784	799
Mental Health & Out of Hours	10,858	95	10,953	998	986	1,248	1,236
Early Help & Communities	4,368	337	4,705	74	90	74	90
PEOPLE	61,226	732	61,958	4	807	784	1,531

Summary – Assistant Director Level

	Original Cash Budget (£'000)	Virements & Budget C/Fwds (£'000)	Current Approved Cash Budget (£'000)	Variance – BCS (£'000)		Variance – WCS (£'000)	
				Last Month	This Month	Last Month	This Month
Interest and Investment Income	1,645	0	1,645	0	-800	0	-800
Minimum & Voluntary Revenue Provisions	2,242	0	2,242	-161	-161	-161	-161
Council Wide Items	657	-528	129	0	20	0	20
New Homes Bonus Grant	-2,294	0	-2,294	0	0	0	0
Covid-19 LA Support Grant	-1,160	0	-1,160	0	0	0	0
Local Council Tax Support Grant	-9,537	0	-9,537	0	0	0	0
Business Rates Income Growth & Grants	-7,500	0	-7,500	0	0	0	0
Other	-61	0	-61	0	0	0	0
NON-DEPARTMENTAL	-16,008	-528	-16,536	-161	-941	-161	-941
TOTAL	77,547	1,982	79,529	949	1,195	2,280	2,676

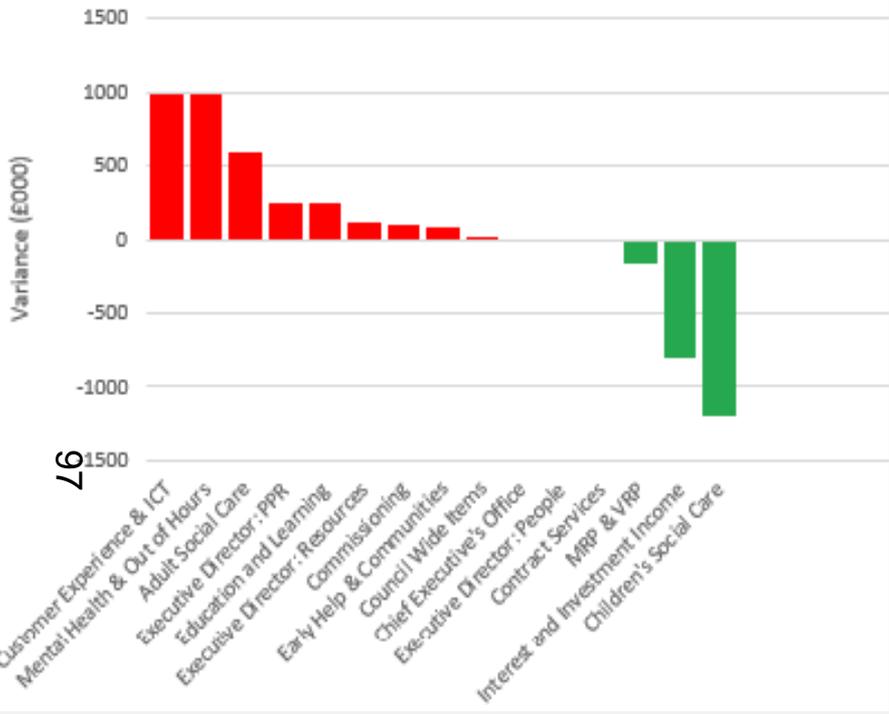
CORPORATE CONTINGENCY	1,900	-67	1,833	-1,833	-1,833	-1,833	-1,833
TOTAL	79,447	1,915	81,362	-884	-638	447	843

EARMARKED RESERVES	1,529	-1,915	-386	0	0	0	0
OVERALL TOTAL	80,976	0	80,976	-884	-638	447	843

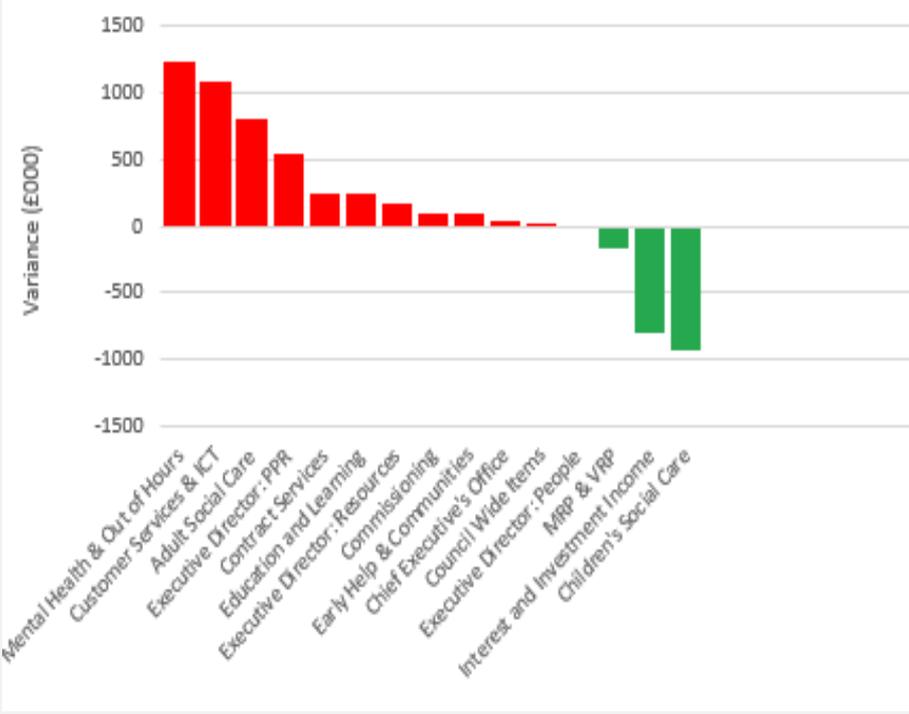
NON-CASH BUDGETS	-546	0	-546	0	0	0	0
SCHOOL BUDGET	7,682	0	7,682				
OVERALL TOTAL	88,112	0	88,112				

Cash Budget Summary

Best Case Scenario Variances



Worst Case Scenario Variances



Cash Budget Summary – New Variances

The variances reported by directorates indicate expenditure below the approved budget in the Best Case scenario (-£0.638m) and above the budget in the Worst Case (£0.843m), after taking into account the Corporate Contingency £1.833m).

CENTRAL

Significant Variances

- Development Control income is currently projected to be below budget with the full impact shown in the Worst Case and the Best Case showing income more in line with pre-covid levels (£0.100m Best Case and £0.200m Worst Case).
- The income from Building Regulations is insufficient to offset all of the overheads (£0.151m) and increased staffing costs. The account is in deficit and therefore no reserve is held to offset this pressure (£0.167m Best Case and £0.216m Worst Case). Increased Reactive Maintenance payments to take account of inflationary increases incurred by the Contractor (£0.100m both scenarios).
- The previously reported bus contract variance has been reversed, following confirmation from the Department of Transport that bus recovery grant has been extended until the end of the year (-£0.082m Best Case and -£0.178m Worst Case).
- Based on income received to July the Look Out is currently projecting an underachievement of income (£0.086m). This has only been reflected in the Worst Case scenario at this stage as August is usually a more positive month and so the Best Case assumes an improving position.
- Budget is insufficient for completing the remaining tree priority safety works, The best case assumes the use of reserve funding (£0.050m Worst case).

DELIVERY

Significant Variances

- No new variances to report

PEOPLE

Significant Variances

- Within Education and Learning, the overspend on the Devolved Staffing Budget has increased by £0.283m to £0.356m in both scenarios, £0.254m of which relates to Education Psychology (£0.114m) and SEN (£0.140m). The Education Psychology element has been partially offset by additional income from school trading and the health funded Neurodiversity project (-£0.094m both scenarios). Additional specialist legal consultancy has also been procured (£0.060m both scenarios).

Cash Budget Summary – New Variances

The variances reported by directorates indicate expenditure below the approved budget in the Best Case scenario (-£0.638m) and above the budget in the Worst Case (£0.843m), after taking into account the Corporate Contingency £1.833m).

PEOPLE continued

Significant Variances

- CLA placement costs have increased by £0.357m, with residential costs showing the greatest increase, and numbers have increased by 1 to 112 FTE. The DSB forecast overspend has increased by £0.113m mainly as a result of greater usage of agency staff. Childcare Solicitor costs are expected to exceed the joint arrangement budget by £0.087m. The overall net movement is £0.533m Best case and £0.477m Worst Case.

NON DEPARTMENTAL

Significant Variances

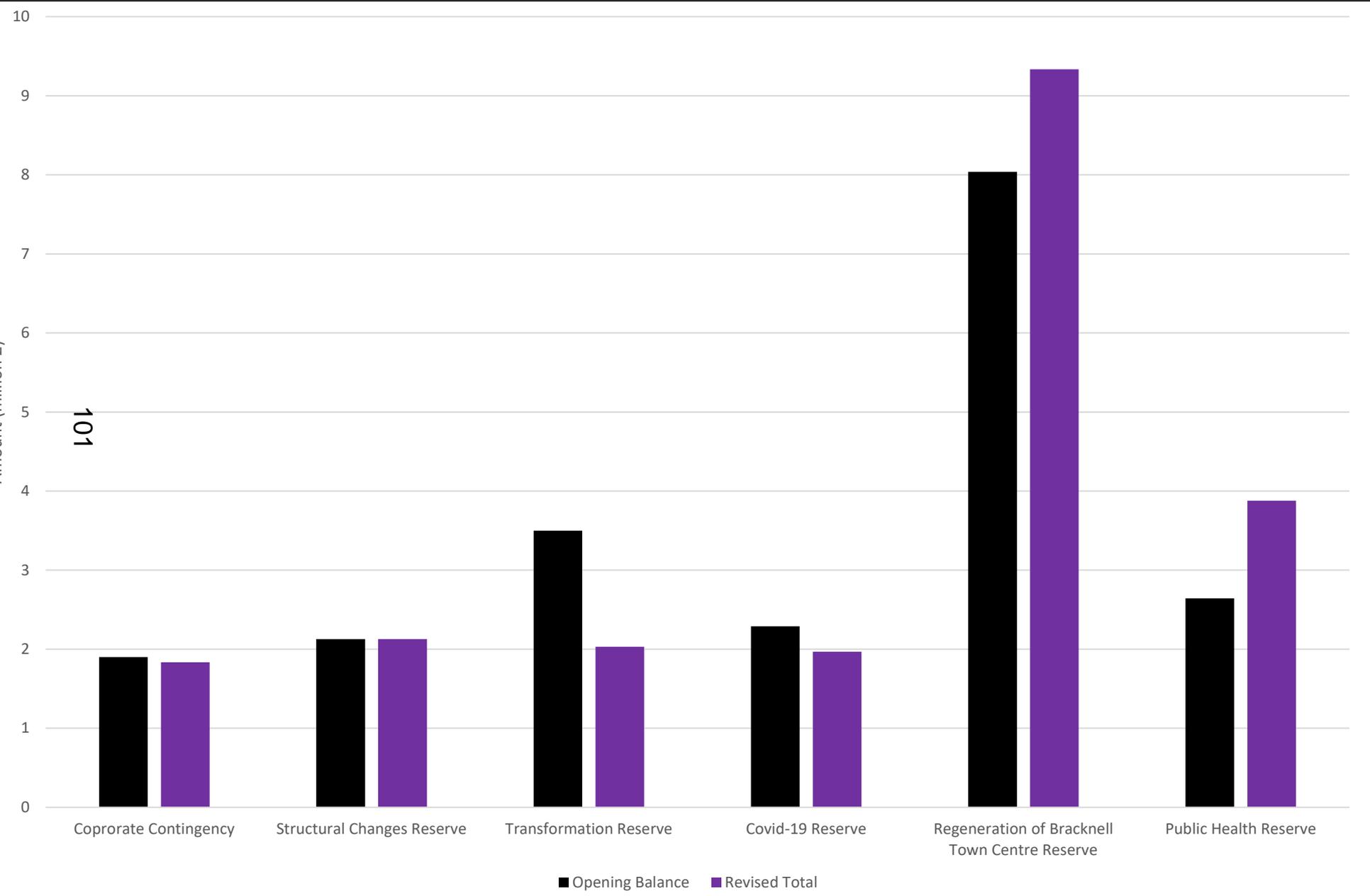
- As interest rates increase our Money Market Funds and cashflow position continue to out-perform budgetary expectations (-£0.800m both scenarios).

Earmarked Reserves

DESCRIPTION	Corporate Contingency (£'000)	Structural Changes Reserve (£'000)	Transformation Reserve (£'000)	Covid-19 Reserve (£'000)	Regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre Reserve (£'000)	Public Health Reserve (£'000)
OPENING BALANCE	1,900	2,128	3,499	2,289	8,037	2,642
Budgeted Increase / (Decrease)			1,500	-320	1,514	
Nine projects to be funded from the Public Health Reserve						1,235
Business Change Team			-722			
Childrens Social Care Placements & Fostering			-60			
CSC - SEN Improvement Plan (includes £65k for 23/24)			-229			
Childrens Social Care - Market Development			-53			
Adult Social Care Conversations Model			-75			
Adult Social Care - Quality Assurance Resource			-43			
Adult Social Care - Core Process Review			-48			
Adult Social Care - Business Systems			-50			
Adult Social Care - Target Operating Model			-26			
Adult Social Care - Finance Reform			-117			
Adult Social Care - Bridgewell Project stage 2 design			-85			
Property - Asset Review			-60			
Chief Executive - Assistant Director: Strategic Projects Post			-94			
Chief Executive - Policy & Performance Lead Post			-55			
Bracknell Forest Lottery			-7			
Development of Leisure Strategy			-50			
Development of an Arts and Culture Strategy			-40			
Initial works related to the replacement of Bracknell Leisure Centre (for 23/24)			-50			
ICT - Technology to support hybrid meetings			-60			
Development of Housing and Homeslessness Strategies			-50			
Feasibility study to inform options to move the Central Library to another town centre location					-20	
Project to deliver 5G					-50	
Preserving capacity for economic development activities following the uncertainty of the future funding arrangement for LEPs					-70	
Joint Venture Business Partner					-75	
Restructure of ICT team (includes £200K for next year)			-400			
Funding for a Head of Corporate Complaints and £5k of incidental costs	-66					
Childrens Social Care - Mosaic development & implementation			-270			
Adult Social Care - ContrOCC, LAS and Imosphere RAS development and implementation			-221			
Power BI Tech Resource			-100			
SEN team systems training			-2			
REVISED TOTAL	1,834	2,128	2,032	1,969	9,336	3,877

100

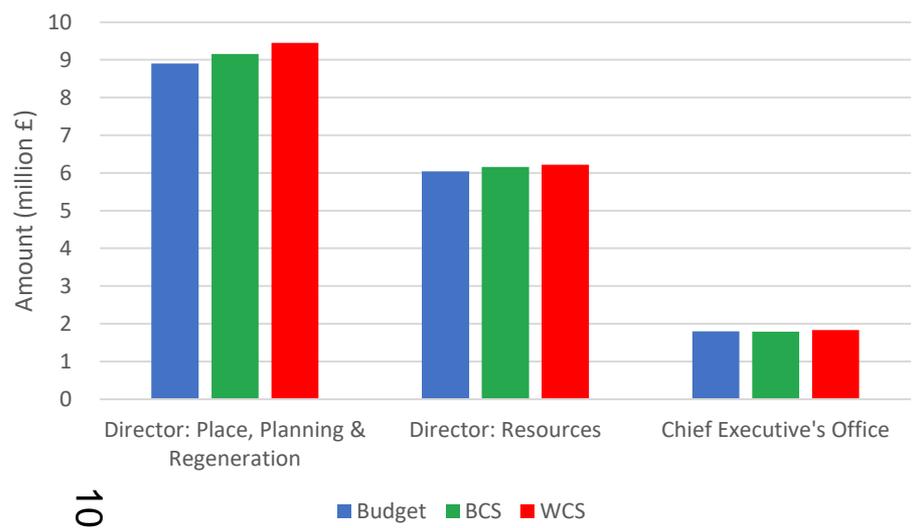
Earmarked Reserves



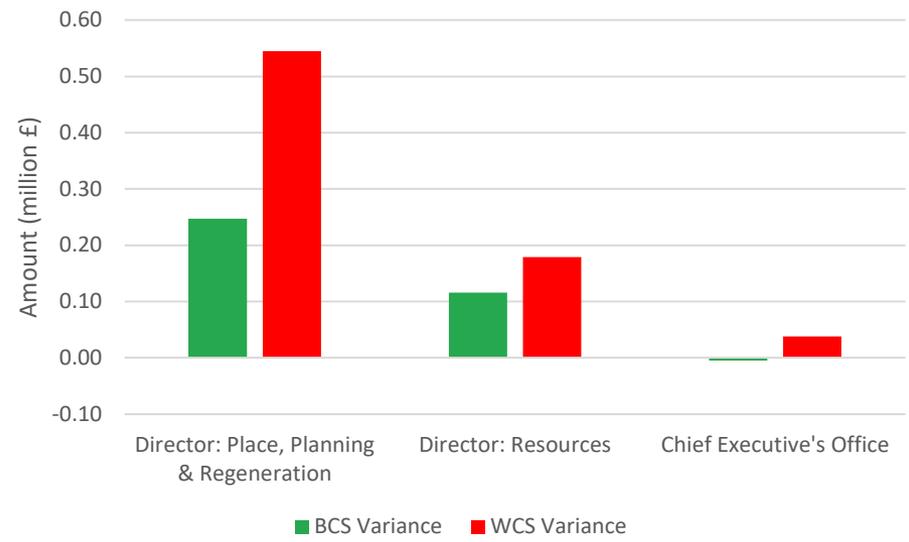
Central Directorates

Central Directorate Summary

Central Directorate Budgets and Forecasts

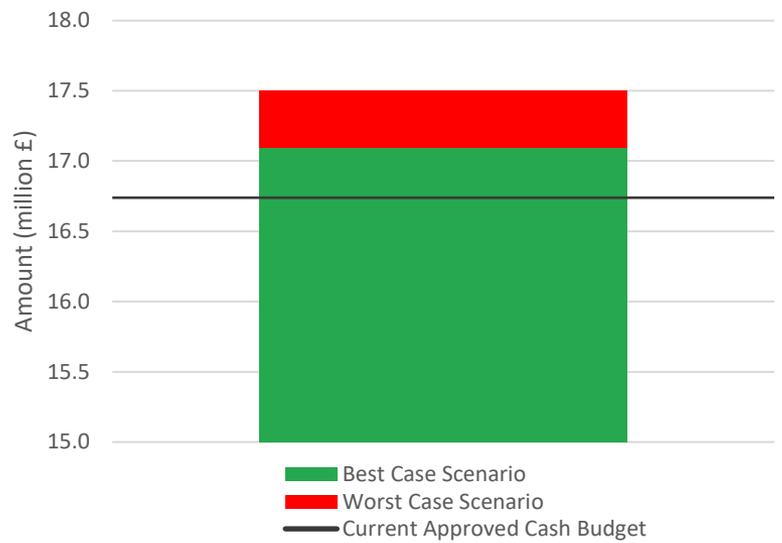


Central Directorate Variances



103

Central Directorate Forecast Outturn and Budget



Summary and Significant Cumulative Variances

A forecast overspend of £0.358m Best Case and £0.762m Worst Case. This is a deterioration of £0.223m Best Case and £0.429m Worst Case compared to last month.

The most significant cumulative variances are:

- Pressure on the DSB due to insufficient vacancies to cover the managed vacancy factor. DMTs will continue to act throughout the year to work towards balancing the staffing budget (£0.097m Worst Case).
- Reduction in Concessionary Fares payments based on year to date data (-£0.080m both scenarios).
- Increased Reactive Maintenance payments to take account of inflationary increases incurred by the Contractor and additional cost of tree works (£0.100m Bests Case and £0.150m Worst Case).
- Development Control income is currently projected to be below budget (£0.100m Best Case and £0.200m Worst Case).
- The income from Building Regulations is insufficient to offset all the overheads (£0.151m) and increased staffing costs (£0.167m Best Case and £0.216m Worst Case).
- An underachievement of net income at the Look Out (£0.086m Worst Case).

Central Directorate Significant Movements this Month

Department	Description	BCS (£'000)	WCS (£'000)
CENTRAL	Variiances Previously Reported	135	333
PPR: Director	An underspend of £0.015m across various supplies and services budgets.	-15	-15
PPR: Head of Planning	Development Control income is currently projected to be £0.200m below budget which is reflected in the WCS, the BCS (£0.100m) assumes the position will be more in line with pre-covid levels.	100	200
PPR: Building Control	The income the service will generate is insufficient offset all of the overheads (£0.151m) and the increased staffing costs. The Building Regulations account is in deficit and therefore no reserve is held to offset this pressure.	167	216
PPR: Transport Strategy	The previously reported bus contract variance has been reversed, following confirmation from the Department of Transport that bus recovery grant has been extened until the end of the year.	-82	-178
PPR: Highway Engineering	It is anticipated that income received for the administration fee on RCW footway crossing works will exceed the budget for the year.	-25	-25
PPR: Reactive Maintenance	Budget is insufficient for completing the remaining tree priority safety works, including the driven and priority routes work to rectify defects identified and the ad-hoc safety issues that will inevitably arise in-year. The best case reflects the use of reserve funding.	0	50
PPR: The Look Out	Based on income received to July the Look Out is currently projecting an underachievement of income. This has only been reflected in the WCS at this stage as August is usually a more positive month and so the BCS assumes an improving position.	0	86
PPR: Regeneration & Economic Development	Underspends across various supplies and services budgets	-10	-10
RESOURCES Finance	Unit4 has conducted an audit of our use of Agresso, the Council's financial system, which identified that there are now additional users for certain products resulting in higher costs.	45	45
RESOURCES Human Resources	Occupational Health and Counselling services are projected to exceed the budget.	43	43
DSB	Posts will be required to be held vacant to meet the Departments Managed Vacancy, but based on early projections there are currently insufficient vacancies to meet the target which will result in an overspend (Resources £0.063m, a reduction of £0.003m on the previously reported overspend; PPR -(£0.013m), an increase of £0.016m and CEX £0.038m, an increase of £0.004m).	0	17
CENTRAL	Final Variiances	358	762

Central Directorate Savings RAG ratings

CENTRAL - CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE

Description Impact	2022/23 £'000	Delivered On Track Not Delivered	Notes
Equalities and Engagement Small reductions in budgets for publicity and marketing, licences, community centre equipment and other fees for bought in services.	(5)		
Communications and Marketing Reduction in the photography/ videography budget for the central communications and marketing team.	(2)		
CENTRAL - CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE TOTAL	(7)		

CENTRAL – RESOURCES

Description Impact	2022/23 £'000	Delivered On Track Not Delivered	Notes
Audit Reduction in the budget for external audit support, which offsets the pressure of the creation of an in-house Senior Auditor.	(51)		Not started recruiting yet which could mean having to buy in more resources from TAA and WBC. WBC have also increased their daily rate by 21% which is quite a big hike as we buy about 120 days from them a year. This would increase costs by over £7k. They had not increased it for some time, and we do get high calibre staff from them but our contracted budget is now fairly <u>small</u> so it makes quite a difference
Revenues Deletion of the bankruptcy budget, which has been consistently underspent.	(11)		
Revenues Future expenditure for council tax new burdens support will be partly offset by grants.	(4)		
Revenues The annual cost of printing Council tax bills has been below budget in recent years. The proposed saving also reflects a system change that will enable customers to access their accounts and print bills themselves. This will be communicated to residents when the changes have been fully tested and will operate on an "opt in" basis.	(20)		
Human Resources Use of the new collaboration space in Time Square for staff award ceremonies, removing the need for budget to meet external room hire costs.	(2)		
Business Improvement District Income will be received for support services provided to the Bracknell BID.	(13)		
Revenues Reduction in banking charges reflecting the 2020/21 out-turn position, considering additional gov.uk charges.	(5)		
Resources Small reductions in budgets for transport, mileage, public transport etc. to reflect spend in recent years across the Department.	(7)		
Organisational Development Reduction in the core training budget, to be supplemented by drawing down from reserves held for training. Use of training budgets is being driven by the results of a recent survey of managers and staff on learning and development needs. In addition, there will be a further £15k reduction in training budgets due to commitments linked to the agreed centralisation of training budgets in 2021/22.	(25)		
Resources Reductions in various supplies and services budgets across the Department to reflect spend in recent years	(17)		
Treasury Reduction in supplies and services budgets following a review of services provided by external advisors.	(10)		
Council Contracts Review of council wide contracts, and opportunities.	(1)		
CENTRAL – RESOURCES TOTAL	(166)		

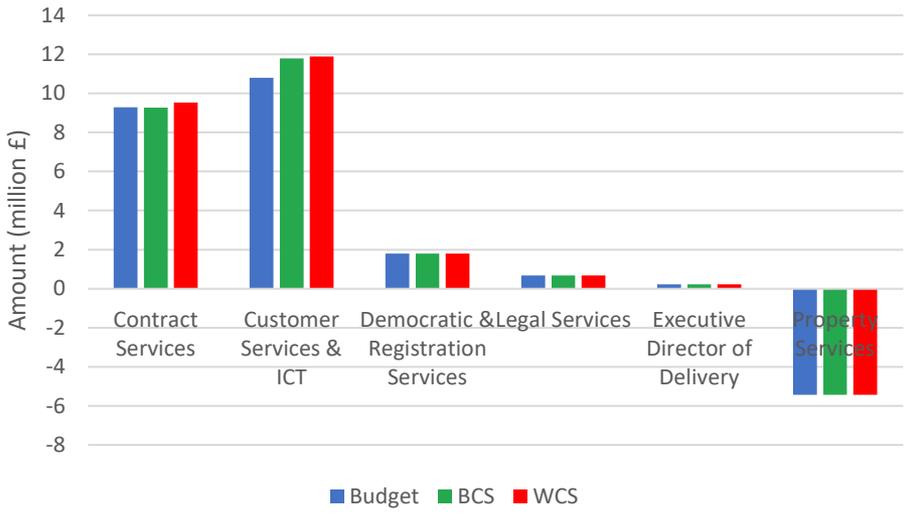
CENTRAL – PLACE, PLANNING & REGENERATION

Description Impact	2022/23 £'000	Delivered On Track Not Delivered	Notes
Development and Adoptions The costs of street naming and numbering have been met from income received from developers in prior years allowing the maintenance budget to be reduced.	(10)		
Place, Planning & Regeneration Various departmental budgets are consistently underspent.	(20)		
Town Centre Redevelopment Legacy budget 'Small area plans/TC Strategy' consistently underspent.	(15)		
Highways and Transport The new transport model will provide an opportunity for the Council to simply generate outputs for developers, including indications of suitable mitigation work on the highway. This service would be an additional option to the current purchased licenses which enable developers to access and use the model themselves. Indications are that developers would be keen to pay for this specialist service as it would be more efficient.	(50)		
Horseshoe Lake Heads of terms agreed on rental fee for use of Horseshoe Lake by the provider. Residual costs to be met for some aspects of building, but the site will return net income from 2022-23.	(10)		Lease to be signed August 22, rent charging will commence Sep 22. Anticipate £9k receipt 22/23
The Look Out With Phase One transformation complete, net positive trading, (where the service covers both its cash and non-cash costs) will move a step closer in 2022/2023. Additional income potentially greater in successive years, subject to Phase Two transformation being completed.	(50)		Some uncertainty remains about post-COVID trading impact.
CENTRAL – PLACE, PLANNING & REGENERATION TOTAL	(155)		

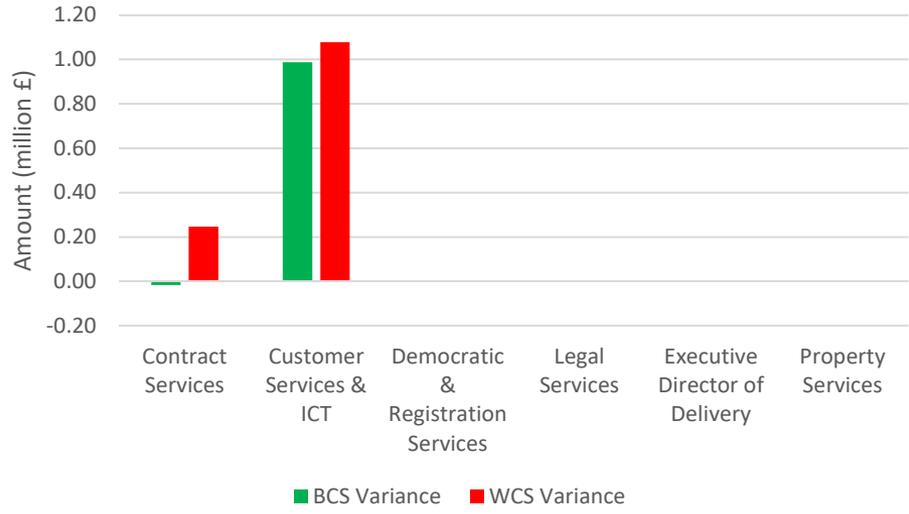
Delivery Directorate

Delivery Directorate Summary

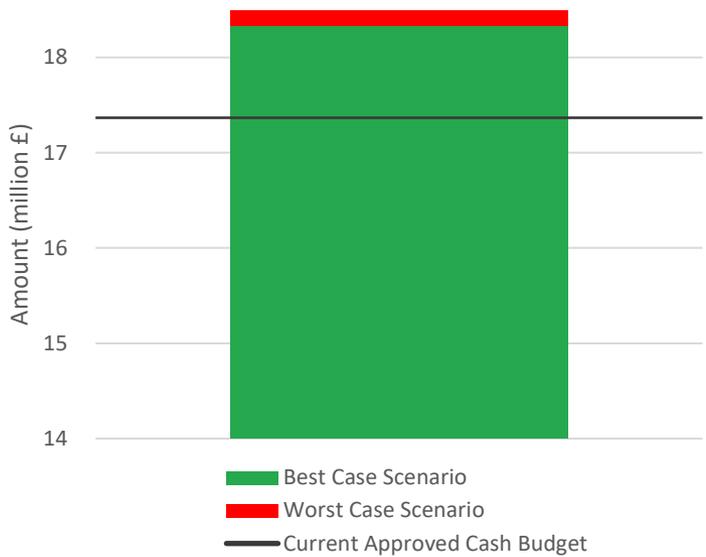
Delivery Directorate Budgets and Forecasts



Delivery Directorate Variances



Delivery Directorate Forecast Outturn and Budget



Summary and Significant Cumulative Variances

A forecast variance of £0.971m (Best Case) and £1.324m (Worst Case). There has been no movement compared to last month.

The most significant cumulative variances are:

- Due to a reduction in tonnages the Waste PFI contract is now expected to underspend (-£0.288m both scenarios).
- A pressure in Waste Collection & Recycling primarily relating to a rise in fuel costs and an increase in the number of properties on existing routes requiring waste collections (£0.090m Worst Case).
- A DSB pressure as there is now less scope to capitalise ICT project management costs (£0.090m Worst Case).
- Pressure relating to unbudgeted ICT project costs, in particular those relating to the transfer of services to the cloud (£0.988m both scenarios).
- An under recovery of car parking income partly offset by a reduction in the associated contract costs (£0.271m Best Case based on a 10% reduction in the number of cars and £0.444m Worst Case based on a 15% reduction).

Delivery Directorate Significant Movements

Department	Description	BCS (£'000)	WCS (£'000)
DELIVERY	Variances Previously Reported	971	1,324
	No new variances to report	0	0
DELIVERY	Final Variances	971	1,324

Delivery Directorate Savings RAG ratings

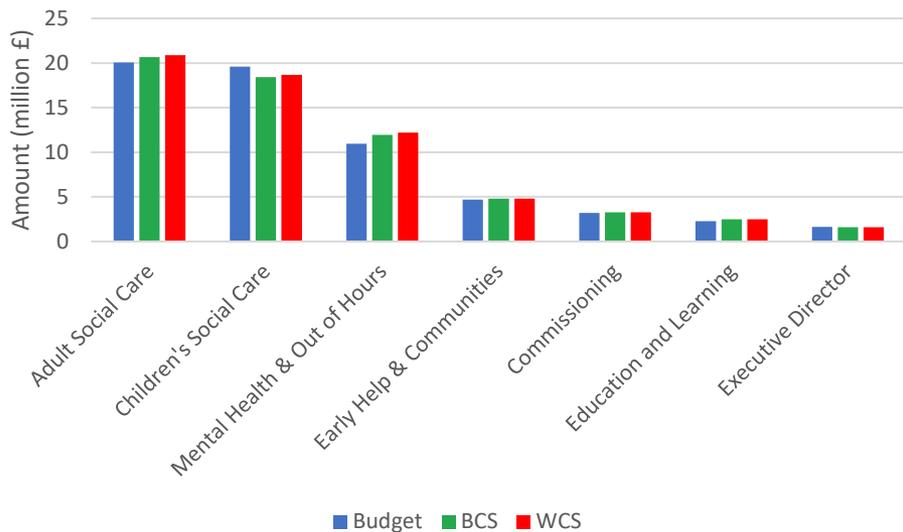
110

Description Impact	2022/23 £'000	Delivered On Track Not Delivered	Notes
On / Off Street Parking The income budget for 2021/22 was reduced by this value to recognise the impact of Covid-19 on the amount of income car parking would generate during the year. This saving is reinstating that reduction.	(777)		Current figures show 15% down on pre-covid
Committee Ongoing underspends in the Licences & Reprographics budgets.	(2)		
Electoral Registration Ongoing underspends in the licences budget and new Electoral Management System contract.	(3)		
Members & Mayoralty Ongoing underspends in the Photography, Publicity, Hospitality, Reprographics, Stationery and Publications budgets.	(5)		Currently under review
ICT This saving reflects the reduced resources required to support services and implement new ones following the transfer of these functions to the 'Cloud'.	(90)		
Libraries Reduction in the stock fund and deletion of vacant posts.	(84)		
Digital Services Reduction in consultancy budget, reflecting that the Website redevelopment will have been completed by 2022/23 and we will have a reduced reliance on specialist expertise to support Drupal developments.	(25)		
Asset Review / Corporate Landlord Model Target to reduce costs and increase income from use of operational property assets.	(50)		To date £15k saving achieved
Health & Safety Deletion of a vacant H&S Adviser role	(8)		Saving achieved
Council Contracts Review of council wide contracts, and opportunities.	(41)		
DELIVERY TOTAL	(1,085)		

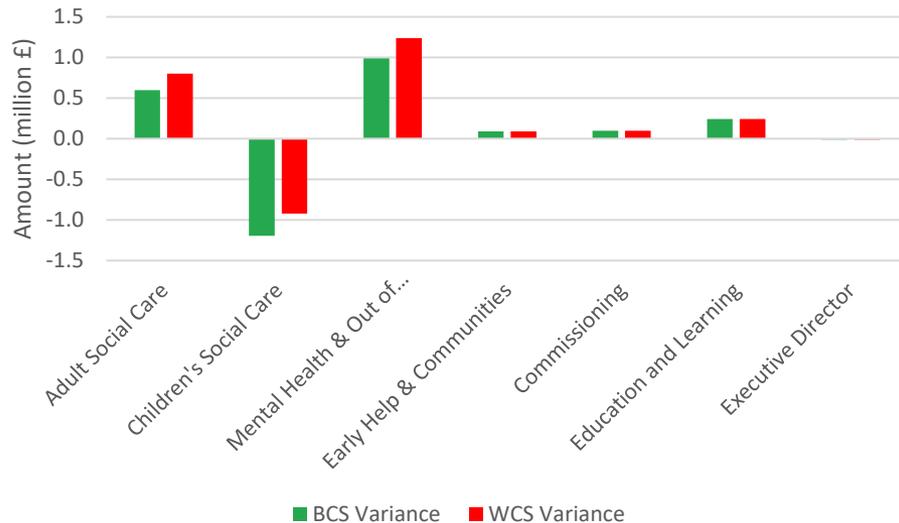
People Directorate

People Directorate Summary

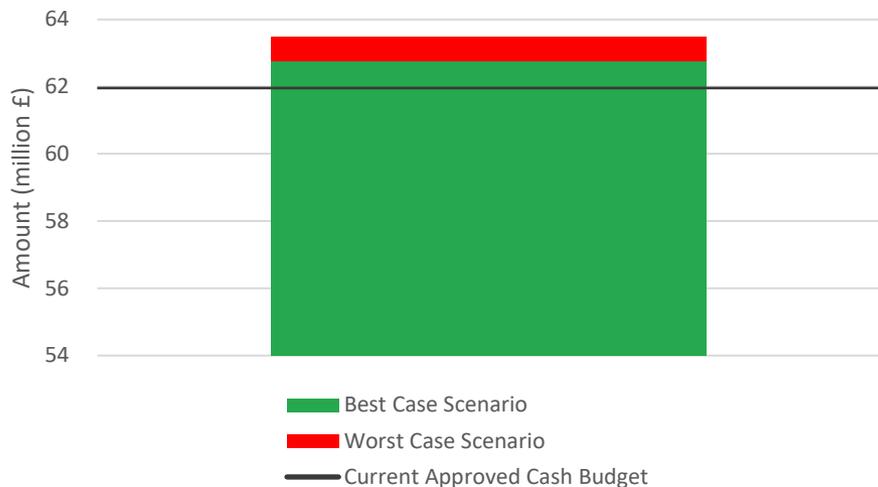
People Directorate Budgets and Forecasts



People Directorate Variances



People Directorate Forecast Outturn and Budget



Summary and Significant Cumulative Variances

A forecast variance of £0.807m (Best Case) and £1.531m (Worst Case). This is a deterioration of £0.803m Best Case / £0.747m Worst Case compared to last month

The most significant cumulative variances are:

- Education and Learning - an overspend on the Devolved Staffing Budget and specialist legal advice partially offset by additional income from school trading and the health funded Neurodiversity project (£0.244m both scenarios).
- Children's Social Care, an underspend due fewer placements than budgeted and additional Continuing Health Care funding partly offset by a net overspend on other support services (-£1.197m Best Case and -£0.923m Worst Case).
- Adult Social Care – additional care costs in ACT and CTPLD partly offset by underspends on vacancies, income from Health and Better Care funding for Hospital Discharges (£0.599m Best Case and £0.799m Worst Case).
- Mental Health & Out of Hours – Additional care costs within CMHT and CMHTOA and reduced income from Forestcare, partly offset by an increased contribution from the Better Care Fund (£0.993m Best Case and £1.243m (Worst Case).
- Commissioning – an overspend on the DSB (£0.097m both scenarios).

People Directorate Significant Movements

Department	Description	BCS (£'000)	WCS (£'000)
PEOPLE	Variances Previously Reported	4	784
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	No new significant variances to report.	1	1
EDUCATION & LEARNING	The overspend on the Devolved Staffing Budget has increased by £0.283m to £0.356m, £0.254m of which relates to Education Psychology (£0.114m) and SEN (£0.140m). In addition, £0.060m of specialist legal consultancy has been procured. The EP element has been partially offset by additional income from school trading and the health funded Neurodiversity project (-£0.094m).	233	233
CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE	<p>CLA placement costs have increased by £0.357m and numbers have increased by 1 to 112 FTE. This includes: for residential a net increase of 1; for semi-independent, net nil change; for IFA a decrease of 1 and for in house fostering a net increase of 1. Additionally, a placement planned for September, originally costed at £0.005m per week has been confirmed at £0.008m per week for 30 weeks.</p> <p>The DSB forecast overspend has increased by £0.113m mainly as a result of greater usage of agency staff. Childcare Solicitor costs are expected to exceed the joint arrangement budget by £0.087m</p>	533	477
CONTRIBUTION TO COSTS FROM SCHOOLS BUDGET	No new variances to report.	0	0
COMMISSIONING	An overspend is projected on the Devolved Staffing Budget	16	16
ADULT SOCIAL CARE	No significant changes to report	15	15
MENTAL HEALTH & OUT OF HOURS	No new significant variances to report.	-11	-11
EARLY HELP & COMMUNITIES	No new significant variances to report with most of the variance relating to staffing.	16	16
PEOPLE	Final Variances	807	1,531

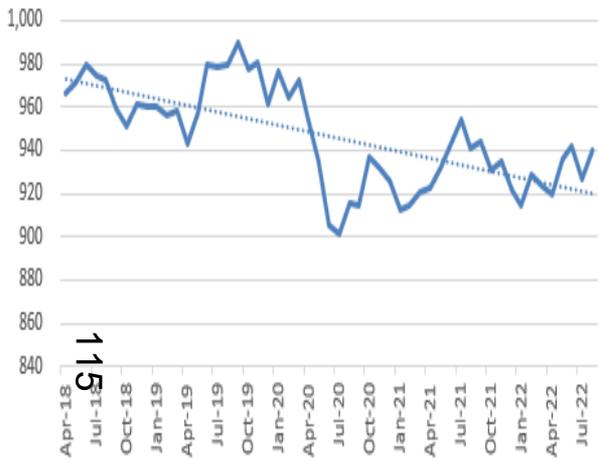
People Directorate Savings RAG Ratings

Description Impact	2022/23 £'000	Delivered On Track At risk	Notes
Heathlands nursing home New care home to open in early 2022. The Council will have a contract for 36 of these beds which will be provided at a competitive price.	-193		There are two key factors that are affecting our confidence in the ongoing savings achieved from the Heathlands service. It is important to note that these affects are as compared to budgeted savings rather than overall financial impact. The impact relates to wider national pressures and not the service or the project.
Homecare framework contract A new framework contract for homecare services will be established from 1 April. This will include a new flat rate which, whilst ensuring the providers currently paid a lower rate receive an increase, overall should have a beneficial impact on the budget.	-124		Increases in the cost of living have led providers to challenge the current rate. Benchmarking is also adding pressure. Increasing by 1.5% to 19.70/hr will reduce the proposed saving by 56K
Surplus budgets Based in prior year-outturns, budgets have been reduced where there are recurrent underspends or the action to achieve the saving has already been completed in prior years:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced management at Child Development Centre 	-15		Post deleted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General resources managed by Education and Learning 	-20		Target at level of 3 year average actual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing agency (2021-22 one-off pressure) 	-80		
Lease of properties to registered providers Negotiation of leases of Council-owned properties to registered providers to provide supported housing.	-20		
Automation of business support Recording of conferences.	-15		Demand for CP conferences continues to be significantly higher than when the saving was proposed (meaning volume of work will offset efficiency savings) and we have just joined the wider CSC Admin review supported by the transformation team (which is a positive but may impact milestones).
Income from schools A number of new Service Level Agreements will be offered to schools by Schools Property, Places and Admissions.	-5		2022-23 sales below 2021-22 actual
Council Contracts Review of council wide contracts, and opportunities, including photocopying.	-8		
PEOPLE TOTAL	-480		

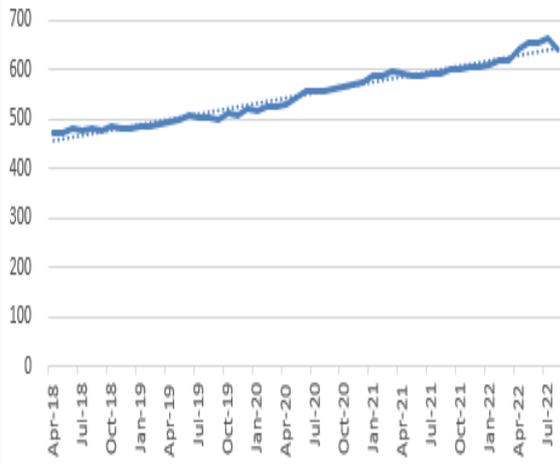
Adult Social Care

All Clients

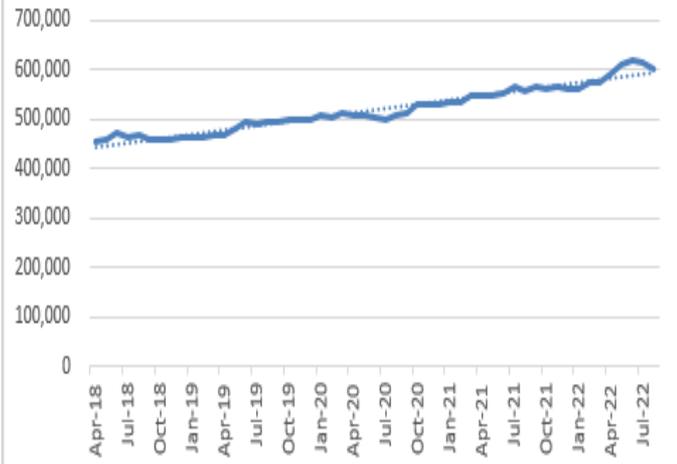
No. of clients



Average weekly cost (i.e. unit cost - £)

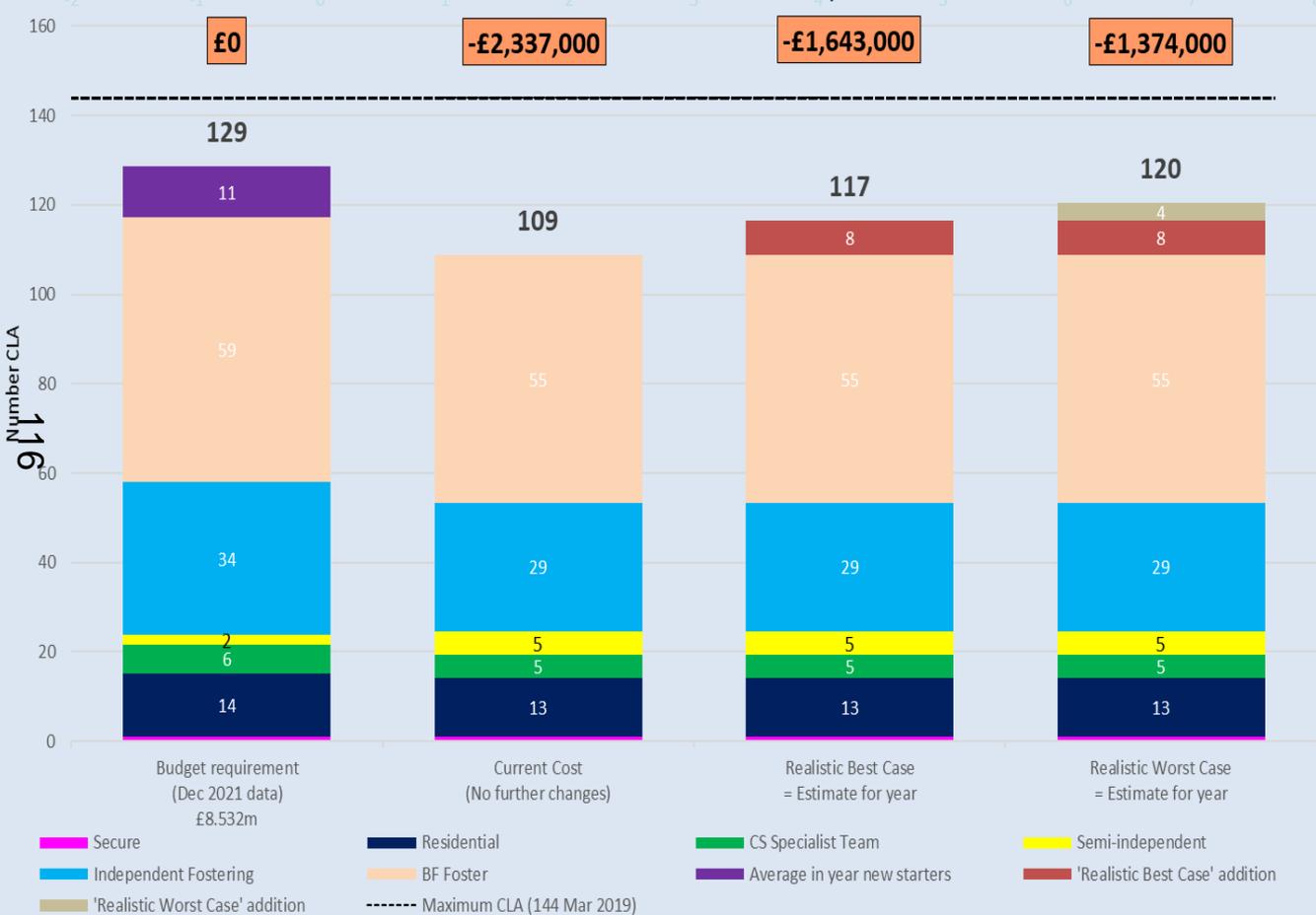


Total Net Weekly cost (£)



Children's Social Care

CLA Numbers (expected average FTE for year - NOT current headcount) and forecast budget variances EXCLUDES Care Leavers and Asylum Seekers



COMMENTS

- Original budget requirement of 129 FTE placements set at 31 December 2021 commitments, with expected 2022-23 leavers removed, plus estimate for new starters based on recent 4-year average
- 31 July actual predicts average 109 FTE for year, excluding any new starters with £2.34m forecast underspend
- Realistic Best Case forecast adds the 4-year average new starter numbers with £1.64m forecast under spend
- Main explanation for variances are:
 - additional £1.1m CHC income secured
 - 12 FTE fewer placements than assumed in the budget (was 15 FTE fewer last month). With the average cost at £57k per placement, this translates to a £0.7m cost reduction
 - £0.2m provision for fee increases (inflation)

Schools Budget

SCHOOLS BUDGET	Budget	Variance – BCS (£'000)		Variance – WCS (£'000)	
		Last Month	This Month	Last Month	This Month
Schools Block	85,475	0	-23	0	-23
High Needs Block	29,345	0	7861	0	8276
Early Years Block	7,980	0	-18	0	-18
Contribution from BFC	182	0	0	0	0
Dedicated Schools Grant	-115,126	0	169	0	169
DSC Reserve - New Schools (to be applied)	-174	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	7,682	0	7989	0	8404

7. THE SCHOOLS BUDGET

The Schools Budget is a ring fenced account, fully funded by external grants, the most significant of which is the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). There are financial concerns regarding the size of the deficit forecast for the High Needs Block and the available options. This is a national issue, recognised by the DfE through the introduction of legislation confirming any accrued debt rests with the DfE and not LAs until at least 31 March 2023.

Current **REALISTIC BEST CASE** forecast:

Pressures on the HNB element of the Schools Budget continues. The SEN Performance Data Score Card shows that between April to July the number of EHCPs have increased by 2.6% to 1,199. If this trend continues, the annual increase will be 93 and 8%. Whilst there is insufficient data from SEN Team at this stage to present the full range of forecast variances in the budget monitoring report, good progress has been made this month and it is appropriate to provide a summary to DMT and include a forecast for the first time, although they do need to be viewed with caution. The significant areas of the HNB budget are set out below, including an outline of the basis of forecasts.

The next slide provides some placement number, total forecast spend and average cost information from current data provided by SEN Team.

1. Kennel Lane Special School +£0.060m forecast over spending. £5.2m budget. Circa £1.98m funds fixed on purchased places, £3.2m budget available to pay as top ups and varies in year. No information yet on new academic year placements which could be significant. At this stage assumes the same £0.133m value of in-year top ups as in 2021-22. £0.033m allocated to date.
2. Top ups paid to BF mainstream schools:-£0.041m under spending. £3.3m budget available to pay as top ups and varies in-year according to pupil needs and numbers. No information on new academic year placements which could be significant. At this stage assumes same value of in-year top ups paid from September to financial year end as from April to August, so a further £0.340m.
3. Top ups paid to other LA schools. Nil variance. £3.2m budget available to pay as top ups and varies in-year according to pupil needs and numbers. No reliable information on these placement types currently available and therefore projecting nil variance.
4. Payments to Non-Maintained Special Schools – pre 16. £0.239m under spending. £9.1m budget available. Data indicates 5.4 FTE fewer placements than 2021-22. Includes 6 YR 6 new starters at £0.3m compared to 34 new starts from September 2021 to March 2022 with spend of £1.2m. Provision for further costs of £0.4m added on the basis of the same average number of new placements each month for the remainder of in 2022-23 as occurred in 2021-22.
5. Payments to Non-Maintained Special Schools – post 16. £0.209m over spending. £2.2m budget available. Data indicates 43.4 FTE extra placements compared to 2021-22. Includes 7 placements from September 2021 for which no invoices received to date meaning placements are a query. Increase in post 16 cohort not unexpected but size of increase is significant. Provision for further costs of £0.1m added on the basis of the same average number of new placements each month in 2022-23 as occurred in 2021-22 and potential over statement of current costs.
6. Education out of school - £0.446m over spending. £2.3m budget. Over spending primarily relates to College Hall. Potential cost for £0.130m funding for additional staffing costs during suspensions resulting from safeguarding investigation. Budget proposal from CH indicates around 0.£400m funding shortfall. At this stage assumed at £0.150m for best case scenario. Support arrangements put in pace to manage Home tuition service from September following withdrawal from SLA for service management from CH predicts a £0.295m over spending.
7. Within the HNB forecasts set out above, an aggregate provision of £0.894m has been made from previous trends and to reflect uncertainty in areas of data and which have therefore not yet been included in SEN data.
8. Outside the HNB, there is a £0.169m forecast shortfall on DSG income. This relates to the Early Years DSG element and the annual recalculation of funding due from termly census data. The final adjustment to funding is always made after the accounts are closed. There is no overall financial effect from this – it is a timing issue. 2021-22 accounts had income overstated by £0.169m, 2022-23 accounts will be understated by £0.169m.

7. THE SCHOOLS BUDGET

The Schools Budget is a ring fenced account, fully funded by external grants, the most significant of which is the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). There are financial concerns regarding the size of the deficit forecast for the High Needs Block and the available options. This is a national issue, recognised by the DfE through the introduction of legislation confirming any accrued debt rests with the DfE and not LAs.

Future years:

DfE introduced a phased funding reduction to “historic commitments” contained within the DSG allocation for Central School Support Services. There has been a circa 20% reduction in funding from the previous year for the last 3 years (to 2022-23). The expectation is that the full £0.406m allocated in 2019-20 will be withdrawn in due course. The allocation for 2022-23 was £0.208m. This part funds educational attainment and school transport for CLA, family support workers, SEN Commissioning, CAF process, Young People in Sport and Education Health Partnerships. Decisions of future funding for these services will need to be considered as part of each year’s budget setting process.

The DfE are also continuing with their national reforms of school funding, entering a second stage to consider mandating national arrangements to support schools that are currently open to local determination, such as support to schools with in-year increases in pupil numbers. There is also a piece of work to complete to consider a de-delegation funding model for School Improvement Services and a consequential consultation with schools as current grant income has ceased. There is sufficient carry over of unspent grant to fund relevant spend in 2022-23.

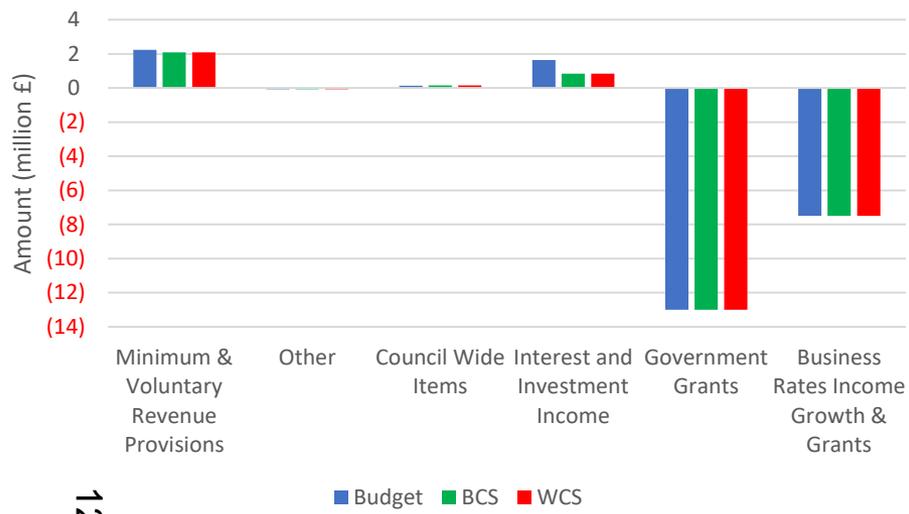
Addition for REALISTIC WORST CASE forecast:

1. At this stage, limited to forecasts on NMSS and is generally a further 50% addition to the provision for future costs made in the realistic best case scenario.
Totals £0.415m

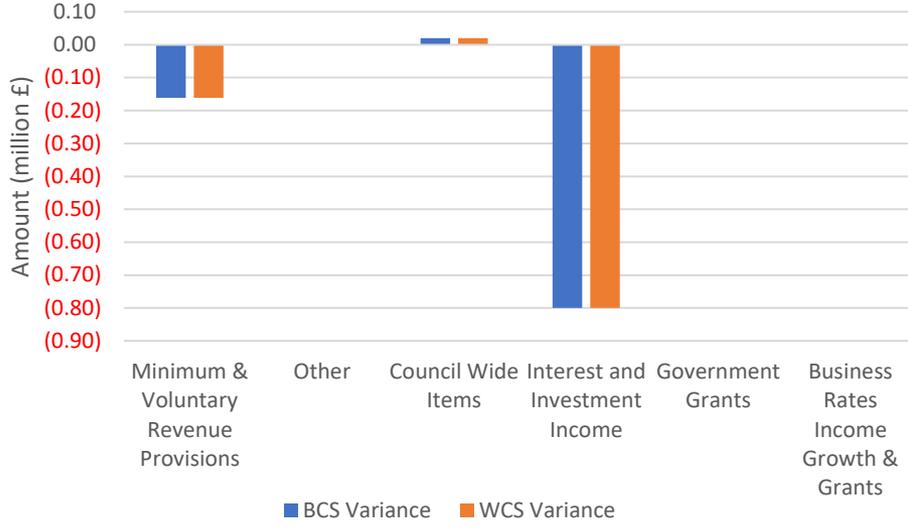
Non-Departmental

Non-Departmental Summary

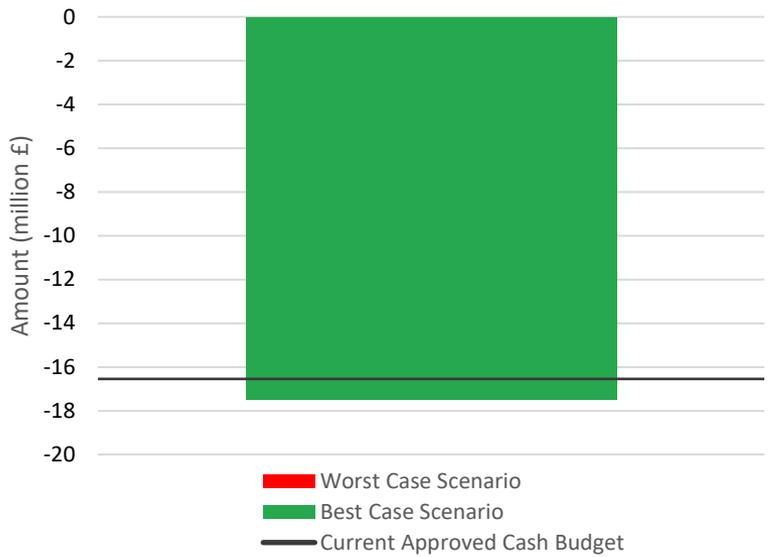
Non-Departmental Budgets and Forecasts



Non-Departmental Variances



Non-Departmental Forecast Outturn and Budget



Summary and Significant Cumulative Variances

The Collection Fund shows the transactions of the Council in relation to Business Rates and Council Tax.

- Any Collection Fund variances will impact on the 2023/24 budget.
- It has been assumed that Vodafone will continue to pay rates to the Council for the rest of the current financial year, an earmarked reserve exists to cover the risk should this prove not to be the case.
- Current projections suggest that the Local Council Tax Benefit Support Scheme could overspend by £0.170m. This primarily relates to additional relief provided to Council Taxpayers on low incomes or experiencing financial hardship (£0.322m). This will be transferred to the General Fund at year end where a budget £0.320m is available to meet the additional costs.

On General Fund budgets there is a variance of -£0.941m in both scenarios. The most significant cumulative variances are:

- the Minimum Revenue Provision (-£0.161m both scenarios) from higher than forecast capital receipts in 2021/22 and significant capital carry forwards into 2022/23.
- Interest - As interest rates increase our Money Market Funds and cashflow position continue to out-perform budgetary expectations (-£0.800m both scenarios)

Non-Departmental Variances

Department	Description	BCS (£'000)	WCS (£'000)
NON-DEPARTMENTAL	Variances Previously Reported	-161	-161
INTEREST	As interest rates increase our Money Market Funds and cashflow position are out-performing expectations.	-800	-800
COUNCIL WIDE ITEMS Essential Car User Allowance	Savings are now unlikely to be achieved this year as a review has yet to be completed.	20	20
NON-DEPARTMENTAL	Final Variances	-941	-941

Recommendations

It is recommended that CMT:

1

Note that the variances reported by directorates indicate expenditure below the approved budget in the Best Case scenario (-£0.638m) and above the budget in the Worst Case (£0.843m), after taking into account the Corporate Contingency £1.833m). This is a deterioration of £0.246m Best Case / £0.396m Worst Case since last month, including a £0.8m reported underspend in treasury budgets. This excludes the impact of the 2022/23 pay award;

2

Note that inflation is a key risk to the budget, particularly the pay award where the initial offer of a £1,925 pay rise equates to a 5.4% increase for Bracknell Forest, approximately £1.8m above the 2% allowance included in the budget. While energy price increases are also potentially significant, no variance has been included at this stage pending further detail of the Government's six month support package for businesses and public bodies being announced;

3

Recognising that there is insufficient headroom in the approved budget to absorb inflationary pressures, approve that the £1.5m Earmarked Reserve for Inflation created as part of the 2021/22 closedown is used to supplement the current approved budget as a one-off measure, noting it is insufficient to cover the impact of the pay award;

4

In response to this position, considers to what extent measures should be put in place to a) limit non-essential expenditure and / or b) proactively seek and implement in year savings;

5

Note the virements being proposed by directorates and the balances remaining on major earmarked reserves;

6

Note that several variances are now being reported on the Schools Budget for the first time indicating an overall variance of £0.489m Best Case and £0.904m Worst Case, in addition to the originally estimated £7.5m in year deficit in the High Needs Block. These are generally work in progress and should therefore be viewed with caution. With the Council being under scrutiny as part of the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme and the current ringfencing of schools block deficits due to end in March 2023, this give cause for significant concern;

7

Requests the Executive Director: People to bring a report to CMT in the next month explaining current schools block pressures and identifying proposals to bring the budget back into balance.