

Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2024/25 – 2027/28

Recommendations of the Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee following consideration of the draft revenue and capital budget proposals for consultation for 2024/25 to 2027/28 to date at the Committee's meeting on 7 December 2023.

All overview and scrutiny committees have received the draft revenue and capital budget proposals for consultation following Cabinet on 18 October 2023, in respect of the portfolio of services falling within their remit. The revenue proposals set out in the report to Cabinet on 18 October 2023 do not yet balance the budget for 2024/25, so further reports will be presented to close the remaining c£18m gap. The next meeting of Cabinet is on 13 December 2023, and there will be subsequent reports to this panel on any further options relating to services within the remit of this committee.

These recommendations will be reported back to Cabinet on 13 December 2023, for them to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals at Cabinet on 7 February 2024 for recommendation in the final financial plan to Council on 22 February 2024.

Response to the draft budget options

The Finance Planning Manager for Adult Social Care introduced the report and underlined that currently, the proposed draft budget had not been balanced but some progress had been made to rectify this.

Due to a lack of clarity within the report, Members queried whether savings as identified in Table B of the report were invest to save proposals or were a result of reduced funding. The Finance Planning Manager clarified that the majority of savings outlined were due to investments being made which were predicted to lead to savings in the subsequent financial years.

The Executive Director for Adult Social Care in absence of the Portfolio Holder, explained the planned savings outlined in Table B and proposed invest to save measures.

A brief discussion took place between officers and Members.

Some members would be supportive of an expansion of the number of Shared Lives placements within the Borough on top of the existing provision. In response, it was noted that the Council were considering placement increases in the future. However, the Shared Lives model wasn't widely used and the attraction of Shared Lives carers remained challenging.

Members were concerned that the proposed savings would reduce service delivery and if not achieved would place further budgetary pressure on the Council's finances in the future.

Officers stressed that the investments made would improve services and increase early intervention, thus reducing future costs.

Several recommendations were made at the end of the item through the Chair. These recommendations were as follows:

- That the Committee express its concern that the proposed savings of £4,544,392 for 2024/25 could potentially be detrimental to those receiving care within the Borough.
- The Committee expresses its concern that the predicted additional income for 2024/25 may not be achieved and this would lead to further budgetary pressures.
- That the planned investments in relation to investment reference 24, 'Community Reablement Service', would be difficult to implement quickly and therefore challenge the deliverability of the planned savings of £1.14 million (OP 24) in the financial year 2024/25.
- That the Committee request that the Cabinet write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to ask for additional funding for social care and a long-term funding model.

These recommendations were not adopted by the Committee when put to the vote.

The Committee Resolved:

That the Committee considered the draft revenue budget proposals to date as attached that related to its remit as shown in Appendices 1 and 2, and that feedback would be presented to Cabinet on 13 December 2023.

That the Committee noted that the revenue budget for 2024/25 was currently not balanced, with a gap of c£18m, and therefore a further report would be required if any changes to draft proposals outlined related to services within the committee's remit.

That the Committee considered the draft capital schemes included in the draft capital programme attached that related to its remit as shown in Appendices 3 and 4, and that feedback would be presented to Cabinet on 13 December 2023.

Author – Jack Thompson, Democratic Services Officer,

☎01922 654196

jack.thompson@walsall.gov.uk

Signed:



Councillor K. Hussain
Chair, Social Care and Health Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

Signed:



Kerrie Allward
Executive Director
Adult Social Care

Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2024/25 – 2027/28

Recommendations of the Scrutiny Overview Committee following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Scrutiny Overview Committee following consideration of the draft revenue and capital budget proposals for consultation for 2024/25 to 2027/28 to date at the Committee's meeting on 11 December 2023.

All overview and scrutiny committees have received the draft revenue and capital budget proposals for consultation following Cabinet on 18 October 2023, in respect of the portfolio of services falling within their remit. The revenue proposals set out in the report to Cabinet on 18 October 2023 do not yet balance the budget for 2024/25, so further reports will be presented to close the remaining £18m gap. The next meeting of Cabinet is on 13 December 2023, and there will be subsequent reports to this panel on any further options relating to services within the remit of this committee.

These recommendations will be reported back to Cabinet on 13 December 2023, for them to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals at Cabinet on 7 February 2024 for recommendation in the final financial plan to Council on 22 February 2024.

Response to the draft budget options

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and outlined that it was still a time of budgetary pressures. He highlighted that many Councils across the country were facing financial pressures. The Council was committed to balance the budget for 2024/25 and the Cabinet were due to consider revised proposals and provisional statement on 13 December 2023.

The Committee considered a supplementary paper, which provided an updated snapshot of the medium-term financial outlook. This paper identified that the financial gap had been reduced from £18.06m to 12.35m from the period between October 2023 and December 2023.

Supporting a dynamic, resilient, and diverse economy where businesses invest, and everyone has the right jobs and the right housing in the right place

A Member sought clarification of the capital development investment scheme. In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that there were a number of capital pipeline schemes which were subject to business case approval. The majority of the schemes related to regeneration activity such as the Walsall Gateway project. The pipeline schemes enabled the Council to be ready and perceptive to Government funding allocations as and when announced.

We get things right, first time and make all services accessible and easy to use

Ref: OP36 – 50% mitigation of Bed and Breakfast costs – increase of temporary accommodation provision

There were concerns that the increase of bed and breakfast costs were a result of an increase of Section 21 notices. In response, the Director of Customer Engagement confirmed that the Council had seen an increase of demand of temporary homelessness. This was a national trend, and Walsall was not unique in this respect. She concluded that a breakdown of temporary accommodation numbers would be circulated to the Committee.

Ref: 40 - Increase in volume of Bank Charges for receiving online payments

The Chair sought clarification on the increases of bank charges. In response, the Director of Customer Engagement confirmed that the increase was a result of an expiration of a payment contract and had looked to renegotiate the contract. Due to inflationary pressures, the new contract and cost associated had resulted in higher costs overall.

The Council will deliver trusted, customer focused, and enabling services, which are recognised by customers and our partners for the value they bring

Ref: Other schemes carried forward from previous years requiring completion.

There was a discussion about the prior year approval schemes in respect of Civic Centre and Council House heating works. In response, the Director of Finance confirmed that Council had received a significant grant from the Midland Energy Hub for works to improve energy efficiency across both sites. The Leader of the Council welcomed the scheme and stated that the buildings were inefficient and suffered from substantial heat loss especially over the winter period. It was noted that building consent had been given to a majority of the works.

Ref: Low Carbon Heating Project – Civic Centre/Town Hall/Council House

A Member queried whether community organisations were eligible for funding in respect of Solar PV. In response, the Director of Finance confirmed that the Council was preparing a project assessment to maximise the effectiveness of Solar PV and renewable investment. Initial bid for funding had been prepared for the Council's total estate and subject to funding further analysis prior to approval.

Ref: Chip & Pin Devices

Concerns were raised about the reduction of cash payment options in respect of Council payments. In response, the Leader of the Council gave assurance that cash payments would always be available for Council service payments. In addition, the Director of Customer Engagement reiterated that the Council had cash payment options and worked with a number of local shops to offer 'PayPoint' to provide cash payment options locally for services such as Council Tax.

Ref: Information Governance – Shortfall in income from Schools.

A Member queried whether there had been a reduction in schools undertaking information governance training or whether schools were procuring training options from alternative providers. In response, it was confirmed that a number of academies had chosen to procure their own training packages which had resulted in a reduction of schools using Council services.

There was a lengthy discussion on the competitiveness of Council traded services. The Leader of the Council confirmed that Portfolio Holders had been requested to review statutory and non-statutory services to enable best use of Council funds. There was a view that circular funding could enable community organisations to run services more efficiently.

Ref: Council Tax

There was a discussion about incentives relating to Council Tax. Officers confirmed that a study would be carried out on whether it would be feasible for the Council to incentivise one-off annual Council Tax payments. This would be subject to whether the Council achieved better investment returns and cashflow as a result.

Ref: 58 – WM Combined Authority contribution for Metro

The Chair sought clarification on the Council's contribution to the metro and funding associated. The Leader of the Council confirmed that there were historical proposals for the metro to be extended to Walsall. Funding was included as part of the transport levy at the West Midlands Combined Authority.

Ref: OP48 – Early Payment Supplier Programme

A general point was raised in respect of supplier payments, the Council offered an incentive for suppliers by way of shortened payment terms if a discount was provided for services.

People can access support in their community to keep safe and well and remain independent at home.

Ref: General Savings by directorate for 2024/25

There were concerns about the proposed savings of £4.59m in Adult Social Care, Public Health and Hub. A Member queried whether savings were a result of a reduction of services or making services much more efficient. In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that the Council was working to make services more efficient, such as keeping individuals in their own homes for care services and treatment. In addition, the Council had also reviewed care assessment procedures to optimise referral processes.

The Council had procured Impower to undertake a review of Children and Adult Social Care to review procedures to improve practices and identify best practice.

A Member welcomed and commended the investment of £28.61m and £14.09m into Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

The people of Walsall feel safe in a cleaner, greener Borough.

Ref: 90, 91 and 96 – Increase of Community Protection Enforcement Officers, Town Centre Guardians and Reintroduce a youth team into the community

A Member sought clarification on the lack of investment into services for 2025/26 and onwards. In response, the Director of Finance confirmed that the investment in 2024/25 had been positioned and would be reoccurring in future years unless stated. The Leader of the Council committed to the provision of delivering youth services in the Borough for the current administration and should be invested in year on year.

A Member sought clarification on the number of recruited community enforcement officers. In response, it was confirmed that 3 officers would be recruited.

The Committee Resolved:

That:

1. **The Committee considered and noted the draft revenue budget proposals 2024/25 –2027/28 to date that related to the remit of the Scrutiny Overview Committee.**
2. **The Committee considered and noted the draft capital schemes 2024/25 – 2027/28 included in the draft capital programme that relate to the remit of the Scrutiny Overview Committee.**
3. **The Committee noted that the revenue budget for 2024/25 is currently not balanced, with a gap of c£18m, and requested that a further report be considered by the Scrutiny Overview Committee if there any significant changes to draft proposals outlined relating to services within the committee’s remit.**
4. **The Committee welcomed investment put forward in respect of youth service provision and request that consideration be given to any further investment needed in the base budget subject to satisfactory feedback data.**

Matt Powis

Senior Democratic Services Officer,

☎01922 652156

matthew.powis@walsall.gov.uk

Signed:

Councillor John Murray

Councillor Murray
Chair, Scrutiny Overview Committee

Signed:



Judith Greenhalgh
Executive Director of
Resources and Transformation