

**PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Council Finances as at the 31st December 2019

Portfolio:	Finance
Wards Affected:	All

SUMMARY

To provide the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee with a high-level view as to the Council's Financial Performance for the period to 31st December 2019.

1. KEY ISSUES

- 1.1 This report covers the first nine months of the financial year to the 31st December 2019. Its purpose is to give members a high-level view of the financial performance of services for the period, highlighting any significant variances against 2019/20 approved budget, which may influence the year-end outturn. It also provides an update on the Capital budget position as well as Debtors and Treasury as at the 31st December 2019.
- 1.2 We are now 9 months into the financial year, which allows us to provide a more accurate forecast as to the outturn at year-end. Services are forecasting that they will be underspent on the budget overall at the end of the financial year. Income for garden waste and parking are currently falling behind budget and so these areas are being monitored closely to see whether there is likely to be any impact as the year progresses.

2. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Revenue Budget

- 2.1 Actuals against Budget for the first nine months are shown in the attached Annex A. Overall corporately, it is forecast that spending will be under budget at the end of the financial year.

Capital Budget

- 2.2 As at the 31st December 2019, £4.1m had been spent on capital projects. This included £2.2m on the new Arena project, £442k for the London Road Block, £663k on renovation grants, £183k on the high street public realm improvements, £288k on Playgrounds, £101k on main square car park refurbishment and £52k on IT related projects.

Treasury Investments

- 2.3 The Council currently has £18M in cash investments and £151m in borrowings. Based on the advice of our Treasury advisers, £57m is made up of longer-term loans from the Public Works Loans Board with the remainder being shorter-term loans from the other local authorities.

3. Debtors

Sundry Debts

- 3.1 Sundry debts include all debts except those relating to housing benefits. At the 31st December 2019, these amounted to £3.8m compared with £9.9m for the same period last year. The reduction of £6.1m relates mainly to a large invoice of 6m that was raised in December 2018, but paid in January 2019. Once this invoice is stripped out, the debt situation has remained fairly static over the period in question.

4. *Housing Benefit Debts*

- 4.1 These debts arise when an overpayment in housing benefit has been made and thus have to be recovered. At the 31st December 2019, the balance was £583k compared with £577k at the end of July 2019. During the last 3 months, £100k was collected and £106k of new debts was raised. 24 debtors, or around 9% of the total, account for over half of the debt.

5. OFFICER COMMENTS

- 5.1 The performance of the first nine months has been encouraging however, a number of income streams will need to be monitored as the year progresses.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee note the report.

7. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 7.1 None

8. CORPORATE OBJECTIVES AND KEY PRIORITIES

- 8.1 This item addresses the Council's Objective of delivering services efficiently, effectively and economically.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 10.1 Regular financial monitoring enables risks to be highlighted at an early stage so that mitigating actions can be taken.

Background Papers	None
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Summary Information on the Revenue Budget Position at 31 December 2019

Services are asked to explain significant variances between their profiled budget and actual expenditure to date and comment on areas of concern.

The statements below show the actual position against profiled budget as at the 31st December 2019 excluding pensions, redundancy and asset recharges, as these are not in control of the services themselves.

Finance

At the end of the third quarter, there are no issues to report and all areas are on track to meet budget targets at the year-end.

Interest received, is expected to be ahead of the budget forecast at year-end, based on the returns received to the 31 December 2019.

Transformation

All budgets are on track to meet their year-end targets except for telephones which is forecasting an overspend relating to both landline and mobile charges and software licences. The software variance is caused in part by the changeover to the cloud and how licences are now calculated for cloud based systems, which is based more on users, rather than just the system itself as in the past.

The Kevin Cantlon Fund will be underspent at the year-end due to low take up and the fund is currently being rebranded to allow a wider range of applicants to apply. It is expected that a carry forward request will be made at the end of the financial year.

Corporate

Corporate expenditure budgets are forecast to be under budget at year-end. The majority of this underspend relates to Government grants that have being received not just in the current year but also in previous years.

Business

The vast majority of the expenditure budgets are on track to be on or around budget at year-end, but there are a couple of matter's that may cause issues as the year progresses.

Car Parking Income is below budget at present due to a decrease in the town centre footfall compared to last year. In addition, there has been no increase in charges. The town centre working group are currently looking into car parking provision in the town centre including fees and charges.

In respect of the Theatre, sales and room hire income are forecasted to be above budget at year-end based on activity so far. Artists fees have exceeded the budget and so may result in an overspend. The theatre is working to ensure that this is managed during the year but the overall performance of the theatre has improved significantly.

Regulatory

The majority of budgets are forecast to be on track to meet budget targets at year-end, planning income is well above budget due to a number of large applications received to date but is expected that activity will reduce for the rest of 2019/20 and into the 2020/21 financial year. Housing, Chobham flood alleviation scheme have also received large government grants during the period, however it is anticipated that these will be requested to be carried forward at year end.

Legal and Property

As the purchase of Theta did not take place until the year-end, the net rental income was not included in the 2019/20 budget. Some of this income will be used to offset increased expenditure in business rates, service charges and planned maintenance costs but will still generate a surplus at the year-end to offset other budget pressures elsewhere.

Investment & Development

Our town centre investments are under pressure due to rent renewals and CVAs. The Council's retail agents are working hard in order to minimise the impact of any shortfall on the year-end outturn.

Community

All budgets are on track to meet budget targets at year-end, other than the variable element of the waste contract, which may report an adverse variance due to issues with Amey around garden waste income. There is a considerable amount of uncertainty with this figure until the dispute has been resolved.