


**Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Progress Update on Recommendations**  
**Interim Progress Report (6 months on)**




**Select Committee Inquiry Report Completion Date:** February 2018


**Date of this update:** September 2018




**Lead Officer responsible for this response:** Richard Ambrose



**Cabinet Member that has signed-off this update:** Martin Tett



Accepted Recommendations	Agreed Yes/No ?	Original Response and Actions	Progress Update	Committee Assessment of Progress (RAG status)
1. That all Business Units across the Council should switch to timely monthly management accounting on an accruals basis including meaningful variance analysis/reporting.	In part	The Cabinet agrees that we need to ensure a disciplined approach to budget forecasting. Monthly accounts are currently produced on a timely basis, including variance analysis. The Director of Finance is leading a review of financial management across the organisation and will consider our forecasting methodology and reporting arrangements as part of that review.	An independent review of our financial management arrangements has confirmed that our current approach to monitoring is right although there are opportunities to improve the accuracy and timeliness of forecasting by reviewing end to end processes. Moving to monthly accrual accounting would increase costs with minimal additional benefits for a local authority. Other counties follow the same approach as us. Following a series of workshops with Business Units an Accountabilities Framework has been written together with the 'Finance Service Offer'. Fundamental to this is greater partnership working together with a forward looking approach around forecasting.	 <p><i>Whilst monthly accruals accounting has been discounted, other improvements including tighter financial monitoring and the introduction of an Accountabilities Framework are welcomed by the Committee.</i></p>

<p>2. That there should be improved level of visibility in individual budget lines across all portfolios for future Budget Scrutiny Inquiries. The financial data submitted should clearly identify the major costs of running the Council e.g. Home to School Transport, the EfW plant income and costs, on street parking revenue, Skills budget, number of Full Time Equivalent (FTEs) staff, costs of agency staff/interims, key drivers of demand in Social Care and associated unit costs. A high level Budget Book to enable more transparency for Members and the Public is proposed.</p>	<p>In part</p>	<p>As part of the review of financial management identified above, we are reviewing reporting arrangements to ensure that financial information is clearly aligned to individual services which will help improve accessibility of the data. We will also carry out research into best practice in other councils, including in relation to the use of budget books, and consider opportunities for improving visibility of the major costs of running the council.</p>	<p>Appropriate information around costs and activity will be provided for future Budget Scrutiny Inquiries. This will help improve the level of visibility and understanding of the budget. Research is currently taking place around how other county authorities present their financial information.</p>	
<p>3. That where there are figures in the County Council budget which will also be reflected in a District Council's budget, there should be liaison between financial colleagues to ensure that the relevant figures agree e.g. recycling credits, S106 funding.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>We fully agree that there should be liaison with partner agencies, including District Councils, where there are key dependencies. There is already good liaison on many of the areas identified by the Select Committee – however, we recognise that there may be occasions where relevant figures do not match as organisations have taken different views.</p>	<p>Liaison between financial colleagues is taking place and will continue to do so.</p>	
<p>4. That mandatory face to face exit interviews should be undertaken for all staff on Range 10 or above, and where deemed appropriate, staff below that range and that the online exit</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The opportunity for face to face exit interviews is already available for all staff. Further steps will be taken to promote this, as well as the online exit interview process, although clearly we cannot make it mandatory for leavers</p>	<p>A new Mandatory management Objective is being launched across BCC for all line managers and this will cover Managing Resources and Managing People.</p>	 <p><i>Face-to-face exit interviews encouraged but not mandated.</i></p>

interview process should be promoted more effectively to capture feedback from staff at other levels.		to participate in these interviews.	The Managing People objective requires amongst other things that line managers are now responsible for ensuring that Leavers complete the BCC online exit interview, unless there are exceptional circumstances such as dismissal or ill health. The objective also encourages face to face exit conversations with the intention that Managers actively manage the exit processes, discussions and any actions on a timely basis. In addition HR will continue to promote the 'last opinion' survey which collects confidential structured information from Leavers about their experience of working at BCC.	
<b>5.</b> That Cabinet ensures that there is clear and effective leadership and programme management in the area of ICT and Digital to ensure that the Council's systems are robust, fit for purpose and can share data, where appropriate. This should include a centralised approval system for ICT procurement to ensure value for money and an improved customer experience.	Yes	The Cabinet agrees that effective leadership and governance arrangements are critical for the delivery of our technology strategy. We agree that it would be useful to ensure a centralised approval system, although will need to take care to ensure that such governance arrangements are designed in a way to be agile and responsive to service requirements.	Good progress has been made with the establishment of the Information and Technology Board. Terms of Reference are currently under consultation and the first Member lead meeting is to be held in September 2018. All business cases for resource allocation and approval will be via this board covering technology and digital for the Council. The September board will approve all projects due for completion prior to April 2019 and budgets required to support	





			these.	
6. That a realistic figure is included in the final Children's Services budget for legal fees.	Yes	There is more work to do to fully understand our expenditure on legal fees in children's services. The Cabinet Member will consider realigning budgets within the overall portfolio budget envelope in order to make the appropriate provision for legal costs. The Cabinet has also proposed setting aside a contingency of £250k to manage the risks associated with this area of expenditure.	Work has been done to analyse the expenditure on legal fees and this has been reported to Children's Budget Board. The expected impact of service improvement work will be to increase the legal spend during the current financial year. This trend is not expected to continue in the long term. The creation of a dedicated court team has enabled clear grip and control to be established.	 <p>£1.98m for 2018/19. However, the question regarding whether this is a realistic figure remains.</p>
7. That the Fostering Service undertakes a benchmarking exercise on foster carers allowances and a best practice review of independent fostering agencies to better inform the Council's approach to recruiting additional in-house foster carers.	In part	As part of our Change for Children Programme, we have a specific focus on increasing our numbers of in-house foster carers. We know from previous research that, in making a choice, foster carers tends to focus on the wrap around support offered rather than the level of allowances. We will continue to review best practice from the public and private sectors and develop our approaches accordingly.	The Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy prioritises a review of allowances to ensure that the BCC offer is comparable to other authorities, as well as to simplify our payment structure to increase clarity for carers and increase the carer transfers and new applications	 <p>Review not undertaken yet.</p>
8. That there should be a detailed independent review of the assumptions and cost drivers used to develop the Children's Services and Health and Wellbeing budgets, as well as a comprehensive review of processes and financial modelling to ensure more	In part	Key drivers of expenditure in these areas are volume of demand and the cost of provision, both of which can be volatile. As a result, it is important to recognise that these budgets can be challenging to predict with accuracy. We have started a detailed review of the processes and methodologies underpinning our forecasting in these	Finance has been working with both Commissioners and the Business Intelligence team to review budget assumptions around volumes and cost pressures. It should be recognised that this is not an exact science as the demand led nature of these services makes	 <p>No detailed independent review has been commissioned. However forecasting</p>

accurate forecasting of spend.		budget areas, in order to provide Members with greater confidence about the budget forecasts during the course of the year. The proposed budget also includes additional contingencies to reflect the high risks within Social Care.	forecasting difficult. The majority of authorities with Social Care responsibilities have overspent in these areas in recent years. A review of forecasting processes has been undertaken to ensure greater accuracy and timeliness.	<i>processes have been reviewed.</i>
<b>9.</b> That the provision of Home to School Transport, both mainstream and children with EHC Plans, by the Council meets national statutory guidelines only, that discretionary transport should be phased out and that parents/guardians are provided with reasonable notice for any policy changes.	In part	Whilst the Council does currently offer some home to school transport provision that goes beyond our statutory obligations, we are committed to achieving full cost recovery. We will also ensure clear consultation with parents and carers when considering any further changes in this area. Further work is needed to fully understand the financial model of the discretionary provision and to establish alternative options for parents and carers.	A project is in place to review all cohorts of pupils and students accessing home to school transport to enable options to be prepared for pre-consultation and consideration, prior to public consultation and implementation of any changes from September 2019.	 <i>A review of the Home to School transport policy is underway, but financial savings are unlikely to be delivered in this financial year.</i>
<b>10.</b> That as part of the Strategic Options Appraisal for redelivering Library Services, an e-book pilot study should be undertaken.	Yes	E-books are currently provided by our libraries; we will explore the further development of such options as part of the future direction of the library service.	Three strands of work are currently underway to identify scope for the development of ebooks. A report summarising the work on all three stands will be produced by the end of December 2018. 1) Cost/ benefit analysis of existing e-materials. This will quantify investment in e-books to date and measure performance and value for money of	 <i>The recommendation is being explored.</i>

			<p>current e-book provision relative to traditional hard copy books.</p> <p><b>2)</b> Production of business case and customer survey to replace most hard copy newspapers with online resources. New digital resources can offer access to over 7,000 digital newspapers and magazines from over 100 countries and in 60 languages.</p> <p><b>3)</b> Business case to consider feasibility of new e-book lending model based around loaning kindle devices to customers.</p>	
<b>11.</b> That, within existing resources, a comprehensive gully survey is undertaken throughout the County to identify accurately the number of gullies and locations and use this to inform the creation of an effective maintenance programme.	Yes	TfB have confirmed that they have accurate records of known gully locations but Cabinet understands the importance of a well maintained highway drainage system and so is allocating a further £125k to this service area in the proposed budget.	The additional resource has allowed for a third emptier to be introduced, this has meant that emptying of catchpits etc. has been made possible as well as additional resource being available for ad-hoc emptying.	
<b>12.</b> That sufficient budget is set aside to enable the introduction of a programme of weed management on footways across the County.	Yes	We recognise that we do not have the resources to undertake a full weed spraying programme. As an alternative, Cabinet is keen to explore options for pilot projects with District or Town/Parish Councils which could	<p>Following discussions with the Deputy Member for Transportation it was agreed:-</p> <p>a) A sum of money was to be allocated to South Bucks District Council to allow for the fitting of</p>	 <i>It is recognised that due to financial constraints it is</i>

		deliver other potential solutions. A sum of £125k has been set aside in the proposed budget to support such initiatives.	a spray bar to their street cleansing fleet. The trial has commenced and results are expected soon. b) As the cost of delivering a meaningful programme was too high TfB were asked to develop a siding out programme that targeted "problem" areas and allows for the full width restoration of foot and cycle ways.	<i>not possible to set aside sufficient budget to address weeds on footways across the whole County but the Committee await results of the different pilot programmes with interest.</i>
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*RAG Status Guidance (For the Select Committee's Assessment)*

	<i>Recommendation implemented to the satisfaction of the committee.</i>		<i>Committee have concerns the recommendation may not be fully delivered to its satisfaction</i>
	<i>Recommendation on track to be completed to the satisfaction of the committee.</i>		<i>Committee consider the recommendation to have not been delivered/implemented</i>