



Budget Scrutiny
14th January 2021

Housing & Regulatory Services



Service Context – Housing & Regulatory Services

Housing & Regulatory - provides engagement, education and enforcement in its delivery of a number of complex statutory regulatory services. Teams also deliver customer facing services in the sensitive areas of Housing and Homelessness and Registration / Coroners, with the ultimate aim of delivering high quality, efficient and responsive services for residents.

Housing - Operates a waiting list and choice based lettings system in Bucks. Works in partnership with RPs and 3rd sector to provide interventions and support to relieve and prevent homelessness and rough sleeping. The service also delivers disabled facilities grants and has an enforcement function to improve housing standards. In 2019/20 there were 4187 homeless presentations, 1600 lets of social housing and 623 new social housing lets delivered.

Trading Standards – a joint arrangement with Surrey County Council. Tackles unfair trading practices, scams, rogue traders and serious organised crime. The service seeks to maintain a fair-trading environment and provides a level playing field for local businesses while improving health and wellbeing of people and communities.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL

Registration services covers births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships. In 19/20 the service hosted 1200 weddings at 80 registered venues and registered 7746 births and deaths. The service continues to adapt ways of working so that services can be delivered during the COVID pandemic. The Coroner is based in Beaconsfield Old Town and is appointed by the Council but is an independent judicial officer.

Environmental Health - has recently been critical in providing a flexible response to the pandemic. In business as usual, EH delivers food safety (hygiene ratings), health and safety advice and enforcement, pollution prevention and control, environmental protection / nuisance interventions, food and private water supply sampling and delivers the Council's air quality and contaminated land strategies. In 19/20 the service responded to over 8,100 environmental health requests.



New Temporary Accommodation at Desborough Road, Wycombe, will help reduce the risk of budget growth on Temporary Accommodation costs in future years.

Service Context – Housing & Regulatory Services

Key Priorities 21/22

- Develop and adopt:
 - An overarching Housing Strategy, underpinned by Homelessness and Rough Sleeper strategies
 - A single Housing Allocations Policy
 - Contaminated Land and Air Quality Strategies to coordinate existing legacy strategies
- Working with partners and across the unitary authority to address housing need of all types, facilitating delivery of affordable housing, temporary accommodation and through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme.
- Harmonisation of outstanding Environmental Health policies and procedures.

Key Risks 21/22

COVID-19 Impact: During the current financial year we have incurred non statutory, discretionary accommodation costs for Rough Sleepers, towards the cost of which we received revenue grant funding from the Next Steps Accommodation Programme as well as the ability to apply for the cold weather fund for additional funding of up to £90k. For next year the initiatives that we already have in train – particularly the Next Steps Accommodation Programme to ‘bring everyone in’ from rough sleeping - will prevent a need for anyone to sleep rough.

In the event of an economic downturn we may see a rise in Temporary Accommodation demand and costs if demand outstrips supply and there is a need to rely on expensive nightly rate/b&b type accommodation. To mitigate this risk we are currently building additional capacity with the new temporary accommodation in High Wycombe, beginning to utilise new accommodation recently built in South Bucks as well as the ability to ‘pool’ our resources.

Qtr 2 2020-21 Financial Position

Housing & Regulatory Services	Budget £000	Y/E Out-turn £000	Forecast Variance £000	%	of which COVID £000	of which BAU £000
Expenditure	12,448	12,711	263	2%	541	(278)
Income	(4,514)	(3,595)	919	20%	712	207
Total	7,934	9,116	1,182	15%	1,253	(71)

At the end of Qtr 2 we reported a pressure of £1.253m due to COVID: a net pressure of £516k from additional temporary accommodation spend for rough sleepers (net cost after Govt. grant received for Next Steps Accommodation Programme); £704k loss of Registrar's income from delayed, cancelled and reduced-scale weddings; £25k of lost income from trading standards (manifests as additional expenditure to Surrey CC due to partnership arrangement); £8k lost environmental health income from not having capacity to deliver external training. Of these pressures:

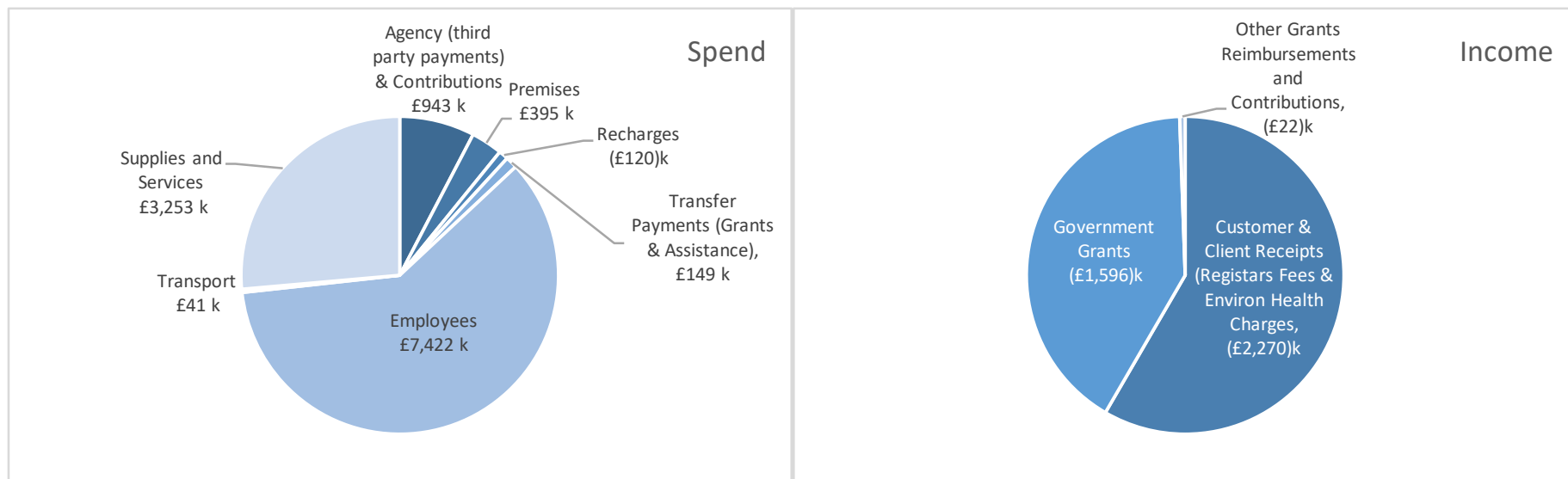
- We only expect registrars income loss to be a continued pressure into next year, but at a much improved level, as we have seen the number of wedding bookings pick up to near pre-COVID levels.
- The Temporary Accommodation pressure experienced this year will be alleviated next year by the acquisition of new 'move on' units as part of the Government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme initiative.

Business-as-usual budgets reported a £71k net underspend, predominantly from staff vacancies.

Housing & Regulatory Services Budget 2021-22

Planning, Growth & Sustainability Directorate	2020-21			2021-22		
	Income £000	Expense £000	Net Budget	Income £000	Expense £000	Net Budget
Economic Growth & Regeneration	(455)	3,517	3,061	(455)	2,603	2,147
Housing & Regulatory Services	(4,516)	12,410	7,894	(3,888)	12,082	8,194
Planning & Environment	(11,112)	14,446	3,334	(9,359)	16,908	7,549
Property & Assets	(23,139)	18,860	(4,279)	(22,851)	19,903	(2,947)
Special Expenses	(77)	292	215	(77)	294	217
Strategic Transport & Infrastructure	(1,108)	3,033	1,925	(1,108)	3,533	2,425
Grand Total	(40,408)	52,557	12,150	(37,739)	55,323	17,585

Housing & Regulatory Services budget highlighted in yellow; shown in context of whole of Planning, Growth & Sustainability Directorate. 20-21 budget as at Qtr 2 is marginally higher than budget presented above as it includes temporary budget increases for pay awards, which will be renewed corporately next year.



Proposed Budget Changes 2021-22

Housing & Regulatory Services	Change £000's
Registrars income loss from weddings due to COVID-19	262
Coroners - salary and mortuary service contract inflation	38
TOTAL	300

- Registrars income loss expected to continue for another year due to capped wedding party numbers. We are expecting the number of weddings to continue to recover back to near pre-COVID levels, but with wedding-party size capped at 15 we are seeing couples moving their weddings from registered venues to Council ceremony rooms (20% swap); the latter command lower fees, therefore income will be reduced. Other registrar activity unaffected (unlike in Lockdown 1).
- Provision made for contractual increase in Coroners Salary (not met by corporate pay award contingencies); Mortuary Services contract out to tender and may be higher than current budget.