

Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting:	6 October 2022
Report Title:	First Financial Review 2022/23
Report of:	Alex Thompson: Director of Finance and Customer Services
Report Reference No:	CP/9/22-23
Ward(s) Affected:	Not applicable

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1.** This report provides members with an early overview of the Cheshire East Council forecast outturn for the financial year 2022/23. Members are being asked to note the financial challenges being experienced by the Council and to recognise the importance of ongoing activity to minimise the impact on services. The report also requests approval for financial changes taking place during the year that require authorisation in line with the Constitution.
- 1.2.** The report highlights the negative impact of increasing inflationary pressures on the Council's budget since it was set in February 2022. It also highlights ongoing costs of COVID-19 scarring, where expenditure is still increased due to the effects of the pandemic.
- 1.3.** Reporting the financial forecast outturn at this stage, and in this format, supports the Council's vision to be an open Council as set out in the Corporate Plan 2021 to 2025. In particular, the priorities for an open and enabling organisation, ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1.** The Council operates a financial cycle of planning, monitoring and reporting. This review is part of the monitoring cycle providing the forecast outturn position and any impacts on planning for next year's budget. This report supports the Council priority of being an open and enabling

organisation, ensuring that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making.

- 2.2.** The Council set its 2022/23 annual budget in February 2022. The budget was balanced, as required, and included important planning assumptions about spending in the year. The budget is part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2022 to 2026.
- 2.3.** The provisional financial outturn for 2021/22 was reported in July 2022 and highlighted good financial management in that year, with an overall revenue outturn favourable variance of £1.1m (0.4% of the net budget). The report also recognised emerging pressure within the final quarter of the year, particularly from rising inflation and complexity of demand for care. It was also acknowledged specific risks remained unmitigated in respect of the Council's Private Finance Initiative and High Needs within the Dedicated Schools Grant. The report also highlighted the end of COVID-19 grant funding. The ongoing assumption was that carried forward grant funding would have to be used to fund ongoing COVID-19 related pressure.
- 2.4.** In monitoring the 2022/23 financial year the national increase in inflation, from 0.4% in February 2021 to 10.1% by July 2022, is having a significant impact on the cost of Council services as well as on the cost of living for local residents. Inflation is affecting several critical areas:
 - 2.4.1.** Service demand and contract inflation: Care needs are demand led, but care costs are rising due to increasing complexity of need as well as rising provider costs linked to staff shortages and utility and fuel prices. Fuel prices are also causing increases in transport and waste services.
 - 2.4.2.** Pay inflation: Assumptions about achieving target inflation at a national level are not realistic in the short to medium term. This is creating cost of living increases that are subsequently leading to increasing wage demands. Pay negotiations for Council staff are impacted by this too, but are carried out at a national, not local, level.
 - 2.4.3.** COVID-19 scarring: Although government funding for COVID-19 related costs has ended there remains an ongoing impact on care services and some services funded from fees and charges. Waste services are also experiencing ongoing tonnage increases from changed behaviour linked to the pandemic.
- 2.5.** The findings of this early review present a need to mitigate emerging financial pressures. The MTFS recognises that the Council has relatively low levels of reserves as funding is instead utilised to manage ongoing service demand. Mitigation can focus on several areas:
 - 2.5.1.** Appropriate use of balances: Carried forward COVID-19 funding, MTFS Reserve, General Reserves and specific service and company reserves levels are being reviewed and funding released to support essential services where practical. Flexible use of Capital receipts is also under

review, which can allow eligible one-off revenue transformation expenditure by services to be funded from the proceeds of asset sales.

- 2.5.2.** Efficiencies and Income generation: Services continue to review non-essential spending requirements to release efficiencies, delay spending or generate additional income from key stakeholders.
- 2.6.** The financial pressure being experienced by Cheshire East Council is not unique. Local authorities, including Cheshire East Council, continue to liaise with government departments over the severity of so many emerging financial issues. The Council achieves this liaison either directly or through professional or political networks.
- 2.7.** The report sets out details of an early review of the Council's forecast financial performance for 2022/23:

Annex 1: First Financial Review 2022/23

- **Financial Stability:** Provides information on the overall financial stability and resilience of the Council. It demonstrates how spending in 2022/23 is being funded, including the positions on overall service budgets, centrally held budgets, council tax and business rates. Further details are contained in the appendices.
- **Appendices:**
 - Appendix 1** Adults and Health Committee.
 - Appendix 2** Children and Families Committee.
 - Appendix 3** Corporate Policy Committee.
 - Appendix 4** Economy and Growth Committee.
 - Appendix 5** Environment and Communities Committee.
 - Appendix 6** Finance Sub-Committee.
 - Appendix 7** Highways and Transport Committee.
 - Appendix 8** Update to the Treasury Management Strategy.
 - Appendix 9** Update to the Investment Strategy.

3. Recommendations

Corporate Policy Committee is asked to:

- 3.1.1.** Note the forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £11.6m against a revised budget of £328.4m (3.5%).
- 3.1.2.** Note the forecast Capital Spending of £187.9m against an approved MTFS budget £185.2m due to slippage carried forward from the previous year.
- 3.1.3.** Endorse the approach of Senior Officers to mitigate the adverse forecasts through the activities outlined in each 'Action Plan' contained in Annex 1 (Appendices 1 to 7), which include:
- Managed restriction of in-year spending, whilst retaining essential services, in consultation with the relevant Committee.

- Reviewing the level of spending on key contracts and reviewing the need for contract renewals during 2022/23.
 - Pricing and grant reviews to ensure income is being fully recovered on related activity.
 - Enhanced vacancy forecasting and management.
 - Re-alignment of, and appropriate use of balances, such as earmarked reserves, General Reserves and capital receipts.
 - Review and reprofile the Capital Programme to prevent any impact of related inflation on the revenue budget.
- 3.2.** Note the contents of Annex 1 and each of the appendices, and note that any financial mitigation decisions requiring member approval will be presented to the appropriate Committee.
- 3.3.** Approve supplementary revenue estimates for specific grants coded directly to services up to and including £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in **Appendix 2 Adults and Health Committee, Section 3 Corporate Grants Register, Table 2.**
- 3.4.** Approve capital supplementary estimates up to and including £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in **Appendix 6, Section 5 Capital Strategy, Table 5.**
- 3.5.** Approve capital virements up to and including £5,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in **Appendix 6, Section 5 Capital Strategy, Table 5.**
- 3.6.** Note that Council will be asked to approve:
- 3.6.1.** Fully funded supplementary revenue estimates for specific grants coded directly to services over £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in **Appendix 1, Section 3 Corporate Grants Register, Table 3, Appendix 2, Section 3 Corporate Grants Register, Table 2 and Appendix 3, Section 3 Corporate Grants Register, Table 2.**
- 3.6.2.** Capital virements over £5,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in **Appendix 6, Section 5 Capital Strategy, Table 6.**

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1.** The overall process for managing the Council's resources focuses on value for money, good governance and stewardship. The approach to these responsibilities is captured in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- 4.2.** The budget and policy framework sets out rules for managing the Council's financial affairs and contains the financial limits that apply in various parts of the Constitution. As part of sound financial management and to comply with the constitution any changes to the budgets agreed by Council in the MTFS

require approval in line with the financial limits within the Finance Procedure Rules.

- 4.3. This report provides strong links between the Council's statutory reporting requirements and the in-year monitoring processes for financial and non-financial management of resources.
- 4.4. In approving the Cheshire East Council Medium-Term Financial Strategy members of the Council had regard to the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves as reported by the s.151 Officer. The s.151 Officer's report highlighted the importance of each element of the MTFs and the requirement to achieve all the proposals within it. The recommendations of this report highlight the need for ongoing activity to manage the financial pressure being experienced by the Council.

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1. None. This report is important to ensure members of the Committee are sighted on the financial pressure the Council is facing and the activity to date to try and mitigate this issue. Activity is required to ensure the Council balances its expenditure and income without serious impact on essential Council services.

6. Background

- 6.1. Managing performance is essential to the achievement of outcomes. This is especially important in evidencing the achievement of value for money across an organisation the size of Cheshire East Council. The Council is the third largest Local Authority in the Northwest of England, responsible for approximately 500 services, supporting over 398,000 local people. Gross annual spending is over £700m, with a revised net revenue budget for 2022/23 of £328.4m.
- 6.2. The management structure of the Council is organised into four directorates: Adults, Health and Integration; Children's Services; Place; and Corporate Services. The Council's reporting structure provides forecasts of a potential year-end outturn within each directorate during the year, as well as highlighting activity carried out in support of each outcome contained within the Corporate Plan.
- 6.3. The political structure of the Council is organised into six committees, with a single sub-committee, all with financial responsibilities acutely aligned to the management structure. Performance against the 2022/23 Budget within each Committee, and the sub-committee, is outlined in Table 1 below.

6.4. Table 1 – Revenue Outturn Forecast split by the Six Service Committees and the Finance Sub-Committee

2022/23	Revised Budget	Forecast Outturn	Forecast Variance
(GROSS Revenue Budget £474.2m)	(NET)		
	£m	£m	£m
Service Committee			
Adults and Health	120.9	132.6	11.7
Children and Families	74.5	78.0	3.5
Economy and Growth	23.6	23.8	0.2
Environment and Communities	44.3	46.2	1.9
Highways and Transport	13.8	14.3	0.5
Corporate Policy	39.8	40.6	0.8
Sub-Committee			
Finance Sub	(316.9)	(323.9)	(7.0)
TOTAL	-	11.6	11.6

- 6.5.** The Council set a balanced net revenue budget of £327.7m at its meeting in February 2022. Current forecasts against the revised budget of £328.4m, shows a potential net expenditure of £340.0m.
- 6.6.** This position reflects the increase in demand led pressures in social care in both the Children’s Services Directorate and Adults, Health and Integration Directorate. This mirrors national events and the County Council’s Network has recently reported that forecast increases in care costs could be more than double those reported as recently as 2021.
- 6.7.** There are further pressures due to increased costs relating to rising inflation and the current national pay offer. The Council, in line with most public sector organisations, relies on government inflation targets when calculating budgets, target inflation remains at 2% but actual inflation is currently exceeding 10%. The Council actually forecast local pay increases of 2.5% recognising potentially higher increases for local lower paid workers. However, current national pay negotiations could see wages rise in excess of 6% for some lower paid workers.
- 6.8.** General Reserve balances are risk assessed and it was highlighted in the MTFS that emerging risks such as inflation and particularly the DSG deficit, as having no alternative funding. To address the issue of emerging financial pressure Senior Officers at the Council have set up Action Plans, which will continue to be developed to identify activities required to bring spending back in line with the MTFS.
- 6.9.** The emerging Action Plans reflect the Committee Structure to allow member oversight of the activities being carried out to manage in-year spending. Any appropriate decisions required from members will be brought

to the Committee's attention via the Action Plans, to ensure appropriate context is provided.

- 6.10. There is a clear ambition for each Committee to achieve spending in-line with the approved MTF5. However, in some cases, given the seriousness of the financial pressure being put on the Council, Committee members should consider options to exceed financial performance targets to retain an overall balanced position.
- 6.11. Whilst some inflation factors may be temporary, the Action Plans must also consider the medium-term resilience of mitigation activity. For example, the use of one-off balances, to mitigate in-year spend, may be effective in the short term, but would not be effective if spending is likely to recur in later years.
- 6.12. On 23 September the Chancellor announced 'The Growth Plan' which included an ambition to achieve a 2.5% trend of growth whilst securing sustainable funding for public services. There is expected to be of marginal benefit to Cheshire East Council from reductions in employer NICs, and there may be beneficial impacts from energy funding announcements which impact Council suppliers and may help local people with the cost of living. However, wider spending and funding impacts for the Council are unlikely to be known until the Local Government Spending Review due later this year.

7. Consultation and Engagement

- 7.1. As part of the budget setting process the Pre-Budget Consultation provided an opportunity for interested parties to review and comment on the Council's Budget proposals. The budget proposals described in the consultation document were Council wide proposals and that consultation was invited on the broad budget proposals. Where the implications of individual proposals were much wider for individuals affected by each proposal, further full and proper consultation was undertaken with people who would potentially be affected by individual budget proposals.

8. Implications

8.1. Legal

- 8.1.1. The legal implications surrounding the process of setting the 2022 to 2026 Medium-Term Financial Strategy were dealt with in the reports relating to that process. The purpose of this paper is to provide a progress report for 2022/23.
- 8.1.2. Other implications arising directly from this report relate to the internal processes of approving supplementary estimates and virements referred to above which are governed by the Finance Procedure Rules.
- 8.1.3. Legal implications that arise when activities funded from the budgets that this report deals with are undertaken, but those implications will be dealt

with in the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records that relate.

8.2. Finance

- 8.2.1.** The Council's financial resources are agreed by Council and aligned to the achievement of stated outcomes for local residents and communities. Monitoring and managing performance helps to ensure that resources are used effectively, and that business planning and financial decision making are made in the right context.
- 8.2.2.** Reserve levels are agreed, by Council, in February each year and are based on a risk assessment that considers the financial challenges facing the Council. If spending associated with in-year delivery of services is not contained within original forecasts for such activity it may be necessary to vire funds from reserves.
- 8.2.3.** The unplanned use of financial reserves could require the Council to deliver a greater level of future savings to replenish reserve balances and / or revise the level of risks associated with the development of the Reserves Strategy in future.
- 8.2.4.** As part of the process to produce this report, senior officers review expenditure and income across all services to support the development of mitigation plans that will return the outturn to a balanced position at year-end.
- 8.2.5.** Forecasts contained within this review provide important information in the process of developing the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Analysis of variances during the year will identify whether such performance is likely to continue, and this enables more robust estimates to be established.

8.3. Policy

- 8.3.1.** This report is a backward look at Council activities and predicts the year-end position.
- 8.3.2.** The forecast outturn position, ongoing considerations for future years, and the impact on general reserves will be fed into the assumptions underpinning the 2023 to 2027 Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

8.4. Equality

- 8.4.1.** Any equality implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

8.5. Human Resources

- 8.5.1.** This report is a backward look at Council activities and states the forecast year-end position. Any HR implications that arise from activities

funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

8.6. Risk Management

8.6.1. Performance and risk management are part of the management processes of the Authority. Risks are captured at Strategic and Operational levels, both in terms of the risk of underperforming and risks to the Council in not delivering its objectives for its residents, businesses, partners and other stakeholders.

8.6.2. Financial risks are assessed and reported on a regular basis, and remedial action taken if and when required. Risks associated with the achievement of the 2021/22 budget and the level of general reserves were factored into the 2022/23 financial scenario, budget and reserves strategy.

8.7. Rural Communities

8.7.1. The report provides details of service provision across the borough.

8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

8.8.1. The report provides details of service provision across the borough.

8.9. Public Health

8.9.1. Public health implications that arise from activities that this report deals with will be dealt with as separate reports to Members or Officer Decision Records as required.

8.10. Climate Change

8.10.1. There are no direct implications for climate change.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Alex Thompson Director of Finance and Customer Services (Section 151 Officer) alex.thompson@cheshireeast.gov.uk 01270 685876
Appendices:	Annex 1 including: Section 1 provides information on the overall financial stability and resilience of the Council. Further details are contained in the appendices. Appendix 1 Adults and Health Committee. Appendix 2 Children and Families Committee. Appendix 3 Corporate Policy Committee. Appendix 4 Economy and Growth Committee. Appendix 5 Environment and Communities Committee. Appendix 6 Finance Sub-Committee. Appendix 7 Highways and Transport Committee. Appendix 8 Update to the Treasury Management Strategy. Appendix 9 Update to the Investment Strategy.
Background Papers:	The following are links to key background documents: Medium-Term Financial Strategy