

GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2018/19

POSITION AS AT 30TH NOVEMBER 2018

Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's General Fund Revenue Budget as at 30th November 2018. The report includes a narrative description of the most significant variances from the profiled latest budget and details any actions required to address these. Appendix A to this report shows the value of the most significant variances (those in excess of £5k) for all of the Council services by Committee and provides a brief explanation for each variance.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council operates a system of Revenue Budget Monitoring which revolves around the production of detailed monthly monitoring reports for budget holders. Significant variances from the expected budget position at the point of monitoring, both for expenditure and income, are summarised in monitoring reports which are periodically reported to each Programme Committee for information purposes. This report therefore details the findings and issues emerging from budget monitoring carried out to 30th November 2018.
- 1.2 It should be noted that work continues on improving budget profiling across the Council in order that budget profiles more accurately reflect the spending pattern of individual budgets across the financial year. This serves to enhance budget monitoring and focus attention on true variances rather than budget profiling issues. This is a continuous process with budget holders so that the improved profiling continues to refine the budget monitoring system.
- 1.3 Council approved the 2018/19 budget at its meeting on 5th March 2018. Subsequently on 25th June 2018 the Finance and Democracy Committee approved the Council's outturn position for 2017/18. The impact of those approvals, including savings and growth options approved at Council and slippage from 2017/18 approved by the Finance and Democracy Committee, are now reflected in the Council's financial ledger.

2. Budget Rightsizing Exercise

- 2.1 Since 2011 an annual budget rightsizing exercise has been undertaken to analyse underspends which have occurred over the last 3 financial years and to adjust current and future year budgets to better reflect the level of resource requirement in the context of current financial constraints. This process was undertaken during the autumn of 2018 and the resulting changes to budgets were reflected in the revised Financial Forecast that was presented to the Council in December 2018. These amendments have also now been reflected in the Council's financial ledger. Therefore this report monitors expenditure and income against the updated approved budgets.

3. Budget Areas to Note

As would be expected, because monitoring is being undertaken as a comparison to recently revised budgets, there are only a small number of variances from that revised position to note. The main variances are described below:

i. Employee Costs

The forecast includes an estimate of 'turnover savings' (delays in the recruitment to vacant posts) of £300k per annum. The actual savings achieved to date in relation to direct employee costs (including the savings from delays in recruitment to posts) are in excess of this level and consequently this budget will be reviewed as part of the next update to the Financial Forecast.

ii. Cemetery and Crematorium Income

Whilst there has been some increase in the number of burials carried out in the year to date the number of cremations held this year has been below expectations. The income budget for cremations has been raised year-on-year as previous income expectations have been exceeded and a review of future income forecasts will be undertaken. Additionally some of the income shortfall is due to restrictions on available service times due to the building works being carried out in relation to the external canopy scheme. This budget will be kept under review during the remainder of the year and the service may yet recover the position if activity increases in the following months.

iii. Green Waste Collection Service income

Subscription to the Green Waste collection service for 2018/19 has now ended and the final number of subscribing households has been higher than forecast (at 17,850 compared to 17,303 in 2017/18), resulting in a favourable variance on the income budget of over £18,000. The budget for 2018/19 and subsequent years will be updated in the next Financial Forecast revision to reflect this increased level of income achieved in 2018/19 and the forecast income for future years.

iv. Fleet and Plant Expenditure

There are a number of favourable variances in respect of vehicle costs. Some are due to the fact that a number of vehicles have been acquired in the past 9 months, replacing older and more expensive to maintain vehicles. Additionally fuel costs for the first part of the year have been lower than anticipated. These budgets will be kept under review during the remainder of the financial year and adjusted as necessary.

v. Council Tax and Housing Benefits

There are currently a number of significant variances on the various control accounts in respect of Council Tax and Housing Benefits, particularly Rent Allowance expenditure. However, as the majority of these are directly reimbursed from central government grant a large variance at year end is not currently anticipated and the variances have therefore been excluded from the variance analysis report. The position will be kept under review throughout the remainder of the year and a MTFS adjustment may follow.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The updated financial forecast as presented to the Council in December 2018 is an improvement in the short-term since Budget Council in March 2018 and now shows surpluses forecast for each of the years up to and including 2022/23. The improved financial forecast position for 2018/19 is due to a number of factors including increased levels of income from retained business rates and the impact of the in-year savings and efficiencies. The Council needs to continue with the approach of delivering savings and efficiencies which have helped deliver balanced budgets and contribute to reserves over recent years. Through continued focus on the importance of financial stability the Council has delivered a significant savings programme since 2007 and has continued to reduce senior management costs and other overheads. Ongoing modernisation work and business improvement will continue to make Council services more efficient, save money and maintain frontline services to customers.
- 4.2 Finance staff work continuously with budget holders across the Council, and are heavily reliant upon budget-holders to be able to understand and quantify the potential impact of in-year hotspot variances within their areas of responsibility.
- 4.3 Regular budget monitoring reports such as this one are an integral part of the Council's financial monitoring framework. These are made available on the Councils website.

REVENUE MONITORING 2018/19 - Period 8 to November 30th November 2018 (Variances in excess of £5K)

Key

BLUE	Variance currently showing but expected to be on target at year end
GREEN	Favourable variance against latest budget
AMBER	Adverse variance against latest budget
RED	Projected adverse outturn variance

Service Area	Detailed Description	Full Year Budget £	Budget as at Period 8 £	Actual & Commitments as at Period 8 £	Variance as at Period 8 £	FAV / ADV	Alert	Budget Holder Comments
FINANCE & DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE / CORPORATE CROSS CUTTING BUDGETS								
All Council services	Employee costs including basic pay, pension, NI, and overtime, plus agency costs	8,895,672	6,040,587	5,924,064	-116,523	FAV	GREEN	The forecast includes an estimate of 'turnover savings' (delays in the recruitment to vacant posts) of £300k per annum. The actual savings achieved to date in relation to direct employee costs (including the savings from delays in recruitment to posts) are in excess of this level and consequently this budget will be reviewed as part of the next update to the Financial Forecast.
Organisational Improvement	Organisational Improvement Costs	23,000	15,336	5,369	-9,967	FAV	BLUE	A number of additional commitments have recently been finalised for upcoming initiatives. It is anticipated that this budget will be fully spent by the end of the financial year.
Legal Services Team	Legal Fees	-10,000	-6,668	-19,478	-12,810	FAV	GREEN	This favourable variance arises from an increase in the level of legal fees, which include fees that are charged for the preparation of Section 106 Developer agreements as well as legal costs recovered in litigation. The actual level of income varies significantly depending on the number of such agreements completed in any given period and the level of costs awarded by the court and recovered. This budget will be kept under review for the remainder of the financial year and may be adjusted in a future update to the Financial Forecast.
Elections - Other/Referendum	Elections - Neighbourhood Plan Referenda	26,411	17,611	0	-17,611	FAV	GREEN	We are currently awaiting the outcome of St Annes Neighbourhood Plan appeal which will determine when this budget will be required. If the budget is not required in this financial year a slippage request into 2019/20 may follow in due course.

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OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE								
Vehicle & Plant	FMS Materials Cost	147,670	98,555	62,965	-35,590	FAV	BLUE	There are a number of favourable variances in respect of vehicle costs. Some are due to the fact that a number of vehicles have been acquired in the past 9 months, replacing older and more expensive to maintain vehicles. Additionally fuel costs for the first part of the year have been lower than anticipated. These budgets will be kept under review during the remainder of the financial year and adjusted as necessary.
	Fuel Costs	318,906	212,660	199,185	-13,475	FAV	BLUE	
	Tyres - Renewal	35,086	23,492	11,735	-11,757	FAV	BLUE	
	Agrippa Signage	11,005	7,365	990	-6,375	FAV	BLUE	
	Hire of Transport	70,377	46,931	20,462	-26,469	FAV	BLUE	
Car Parks	Car Parking Fees	-605,000	-463,417	-508,582	-45,165	FAV	GREEN	The sustained period of good weather during the late spring and summer months led to an increase in the number of visitors to the area resulting in a higher level of parking income as compared to the budget for the period to date. Income during the remainder of the year will be significantly lower than that of the summer period. The budget will be kept under review for the remainder of the financial year and will be adjusted for future years as necessary.
Fylde Waste Schemes	Green Waste Subscription Charge	-517,000	-517,000	-535,510	-18,510	FAV	GREEN	Subscription to the Green Waste collection service for 2018/19 has now ended and the final number of subscribing households has been higher than forecast, resulting in a favourable variance on the income budget of over £18,000. The budget for 2018/19 and subsequent years will be updated in the next Financial Forecast revision to reflect this increased level of income achieved in 2018/19 and the forecast income for future years.

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ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE								
Cemetery & Crematorium	Interments	-200,000	-133,360	-151,098	-17,738	FAV	AMBER	Whilst there has been some increase in the number of burials carried out in the year to date this is more than offset by a significant reduction in the number of cremations carried out. Some of this is due to restrictions on available service times due to the building works being carried out in relation to the external canopy scheme. This budget will be kept under review during the remainder of the year and the service may yet recover the position if activity increases in the following months.
	Cremations	-1,100,000	-733,480	-669,207	64,274	ADV		
Homelessness	CAB - Debt Advice Service	16,366	10,912	4,264	-6,648	FAV	GREEN	Delays in the commencement of this project has led to an underspend in the year to date. The budget will be kept under review and a request for slippage of the remaining funding into 2019/20 may follow in due course.
	Homelessness Reduction Act Initiatives	9,000	6,000	19	-5,981	FAV	GREEN	Alternative sources of central government funding have been used to deliver these initiatives during the first part of the year in order that all available funding is maximised. The budget requirement for the remainder of the year will be kept under review and adjusted as appropriate.
	Void Loss/Recharge Costs	14,290	9,528	-3,462	-12,990	FAV	GREEN	Improved management practices aimed at maintaining a minimum level of voids within the temporary housing units have led to a reduced level of costs during the year. The budget will be kept under review during the remainder of the year and adjusted as appropriate.
	Housing Benefit/Universal Credit Repayment Income	-10,000	-6,668	-12,327	-5,659	FAV	GREEN	Improved management practices have resulted in all temporary accommodation placements being initially funded from available Housing Benefit Grants, together with the prompt establishment of payment agreements where rent arrears occur. The budget will be kept under review during the remainder of the year and adjusted as appropriate.
Taxi Licensing	Private Hire Driver Licences	-12,692	-8,464	-2,892	5,572	ADV	AMBER	In accordance with the Deregulation Act 2015, the Council had to make provision for the issue of three year driver licences, as opposed to the traditional 1 year licence. Whilst we continue to offer the one year licence, take up of the three year licence in 2016/17 has resulted in increased income for that year but reduced income levels for the subsequent two years i.e. 2017/18 and 2018/19. Income is expected to increase again during 2019/20 as the initial three year licences become due for renewal. This budget will be kept under review during the remainder of the financial year and adjusted as necessary.
Community Grants	Community Projects Fund	20,000	13,336	3,186	-10,150	FAV	BLUE	The availability of funding for community groups from this initiative is currently being widely promoted to increase the number of applications from eligible organisations. It is anticipated that further awards will be made during the remainder of the financial year. This budget will be kept under review.

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PLANNING COMMITTEE								
Development Management	Consultants Fees	51,000	34,008	9,720	-24,288	FAV	BLUE	Consultants will be required to carry out specialist assessment of several planning applications during the final quarter of the year and it is expected that this work will be completed within the approved budget by the end of the financial year.
	Archaeology and Ecology Agreement	32,000	21,336	6,594	-14,742	FAV	BLUE	The Archaeological Service Level Agreement with Lancashire County Council is currently under renegotiation with the Lancashire Districts and, as a result there are a number of outstanding invoices that have not been issued by LCC. It is expected that the budget will be spent by year end.
	Planning Application Fees	-750,000	-500,100	-507,799	-7,699	FAV	BLUE	Planning application fee income for the period is marginally in excess of the budget. The timing of when applications are made is often difficult to forecast and this budget will be kept under review for the remainder of the financial year and may be adjusted in a future update to the Financial Forecast.
Planning Appeals	Planning Appeal Hearing Costs	80,000	53,344	60,058	6,714	ADV	BLUE	A number of planning inquiries have taken place during the year to date and others may be contested later in the year which will result in further costs being incurred. This budget will be kept under review during the remainder of the financial year.
Planning Enforcement	Enforcement Costs	15,000	10,000	0	-10,000	FAV	BLUE	This budget relates to potential legal action to secure compliance with conditions at a particular site. It is expected that these costs will be incurred during the final quarter of the year.
Development Management Team	Consultants Fees	40,000	26,672	0	-26,672	FAV	BLUE	This budget has not been required in the financial year to date. This budget will be kept under review for the remainder of the financial year and may be adjusted in a future update to the Financial Forecast.
Local Plan	Legal Fees and Court Costs	24,000	16,004	27,375	11,371	ADV	AMBER	It is expected that there will be no further costs against this code during the remainder of the financial year and that a relatively minor overspend will be reported for the whole of 2018/19 for this budget.