

Title of Report	2023/24 Overall Financial Position - September 2023		
Key Decision No	FCR S207		
For Consideration By	Cabinet		
Meeting Date	27 November 2023		
Cabinet Member	Cllr Robert Chapman, Cabinet Member for Finance, Insourcing and Customer Service		
Classification	Open Report		
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards		
Key Decision & Reason	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">Yes</td> <td>Result in the Council incurring expenditure or savings which are significant having regard to the Council's budget for the service / function</td> </tr> </table>	Yes	Result in the Council incurring expenditure or savings which are significant having regard to the Council's budget for the service / function
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Implementation Date if Not Called In	4th December 2023		
Group Director	Jackie Moylan, Interim Group Director, Finance		

1. **Cabinet Member's Introduction**

- 1.1 This is the fourth Overall Financial Position (OFP) report for 2023/24. It shows that as at September 2023, the Council is forecast to have an overspend of £9.124m on the General Fund, a decrease of £0.176m from the previous month. However, this position includes the application of a backdated refund from HMRC of £867k. If this had not been applied the overspend would have increased by £691k from the previous month.
- 1.2 As can be seen below, the overspend relates to various pressures including:- Adult Social Care (primarily Care Packages, Mental Health and Provided Services); Climate, Homes and Economy (Environmental Operations); Children and Education (Corporate Parenting, Looked After Children and Leaving Care, Disabled Children and Safeguarding and Quality Assurance); F&CR (staffing pressures in Revenues and Benefits and web based computing costs in ICT).
- 1.3 In this financial year, the Council is in a very challenging position and, as set out in paragraph 2.5 below, we are not unique in this regard. The Council must, of course, deal with its own position and the Corporate Leadership Team will continue to work on actions to mitigate and contain the forecast, reporting back here on actions taken. It is essential that we

continue to address this challenge head on if we are to remain financially stable over the longer term.

- 1.4 Despite the recent small reduction in inflation, and taking into account the provision in the budget for increases in energy and fuel costs, this will still significantly impact on the Council's services. Hackney's residents also continue to face significant financial pressures as the inflation surge continues; we set out below details of what the Council is doing to assist residents to manage the impact of the cost of living crisis.
- 1.5 As Cabinet are aware, in 2023-24 we continued our participation in the localised business rates pooling scheme which we entered into in 2022-23 comprising the City of London and 6 other London boroughs. In 2022-23 and 2023-24, we have received a significant financial benefit, estimated to be £5.1m over the two years. Initial work by the scheme's financial advisers, LG Futures, suggests that if we continue our participation in the scheme in 2024-25, this will deliver a financial benefit of £1.6m to £2m to the Council. We are proposing therefore to continue to participate in the scheme in 2024-25.
- 1.6 I commend this report to Cabinet

2. Interim Group Director's Introduction

- 2.1 The OFP shows that the Council is forecast to have an overspend of £14.615m after the application of reserves but before the application of the additional in-year savings set out in the July OFP and two further mitigations both of which are one off. The first mitigation is the budget provision for demand pressures, cost pressures and the ongoing impact of Covid and Cyber (£3.500m); and the second is a recently received backdated refund from HMRC (£0.867m). The application of the savings and mitigations reduces the overspend to £9.124m.
- 2.2 The main areas of overspend are: -

Children's and Education - £3.179m primarily in the area of Corporate Parenting (i.e. looked after children placements). There are also smaller overspends in Looked After Children Leaving Care and Family Intervention Support Services.

Adults, Health and Integration - £8.966m primarily in the area of Care Support Commissioning with smaller overspends in Provided Services and Mental Health.

Climate, Homes and Economy - £0.849m primarily in Environmental Operations with a smaller overspend in Community Safety, Enforcement and Business Regulation.

F&CR - £1.999m - primarily in Benefits and Revenues and ICT. In Benefits and Revenues the primary cause of the overspend is £1.24m of costs

associated with additional staff working on debt recovery, demand caused by the cost of living crisis and manual processes which are required while automation software is restored post cyber. The primary cause of the £666k overspend in ICT relates to the costs of cloud computing, which is being reviewed and will be in part mitigated by work that has recently completed to exit the Council's legacy data centre.

SEND - there is also uncertainty around the DSG high needs deficit and the treatment of any deficit post 2025/26. The brought forward SEND deficit in 2023/24 is circa £17.1m, based on current forecasts this will increase to circa £21.4m by the end of this financial year. The statutory override which allowed this deficit balance to be carried in the Council's accounts has been extended from 31 March 2023 to 31 March 2026 by Government. However, this continues to remain a long term risk for Hackney in the event there is no further funding provided by the Department for Education (DfE) to mitigate this balance. Hackney is included in Tranche 2 of the Delivering Better Value (in SEND) programme which aims to help local authorities maintain effective SEND services, however the programme aims to provide assistance on deficit recovery actions and/or mitigations through a grant of up to £1m, rather than provide direct funding to address the deficit, hence the potential risk to the Council. The grant application has been successful and will be received in October 2023.

- 2.3 There will also be further pressure as a result of the 2023/24 pay award. This will be met from the use of one-off reserves this year but will need to be factored in the budget on an ongoing basis from next year.
- 2.4 Given the direction of travel of the forecast towards the end of 2022/23 the fact that we have a considerable forecast overspend is not a surprise. It is also worth noting that this overspend, with the exception of the Chief Executive's directorate, is Council-wide.
- 2.5 While these pressures are not unique to Hackney, and indeed in areas such as homelessness other boroughs are reporting much more extensive pressures, we have to look to address our own position. There is a concern that if action is not taken the forecast overspend will increase as the year progresses. We need to address this as a leadership team. We have undertaken measures to mitigate the overspend as reported in the July OFP and the leadership team will continue to identify further actions to reduce the forecast overspend.
- 2.6 The General Fund financial position for September is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Overall Financial Position (General Fund) September 2023

Revised Budget £000	Service Area	Forecast Variance Before Reserves £000	Appropriation to Reserves £000	Reserves Usage £000	Forecast Variance After Reserves £000	Change in Variance from last month £000
£k		£k	£k	£k	£k	£k
94,996	Children and Education	7,122	79	-4,021	3,179	643
126,025	Adults, Health and Integration	13,917	160	-5,112	8,966	231
33,803	Climate, Homes & Economy	4,309	70	-3,530	849	-3
25,243	Finance & Corporate Resources	4,601	241	-2,842	1,999	-177
15,062	Chief Executive	1,886	161	-2,425	-378	-1
60,307	General Finance Account	0	0	0	0	0
355,436	SUB TOTAL	31,835	711	-17,930	14,615	693
	Less the budget provision for demand pressures, cost pressures and the ongoing impact of Covid and Cyber				-3,500	
	Less Corporate Savings				-1,124	
	Less Backdated HMRC Refund				-867	
	GENERAL FUND TOTAL	31,835	711	-17,930	9,124	-176

- 2.7 We are forecasting a significant but not full achievement of the 2023/24 budgeted savings. Climate, Homes and Economy (CHE) has achieved £2.508m of the 2023/24 savings plans of £2.858m. The Hackney Commercial Services company saving of £0.350m is being forecast as not being achieved this year given the company is a year behind schedule and this was a saving expected in year three of operations. The company has not established its market share base yet to deliver the 2023/24 savings target.
- 2.8 We are also on course to achieving a significant proportion of the 2023/24 vacancy savings. In CHE, the vacancy factor savings agreed as part of the 2021/22 budget are not being achieved in two of the directorate services, Environmental Operations and Community Safety, Enforcement & Business Regulation (CSEBR). The total of non delivery is £753K. The Heads of Service are reviewing services and budget lines to mitigate the impact of this non delivery.
- 2.9 In 2023-24, Hackney continued its participation in the localised business rates scheme together with the City of London and six other boroughs (Tower Hamlets, Brent, Barnet, Enfield, Haringey and Waltham Forest). This scheme is on course to deliver £5.1m additional income over the period 2022-23 to 2023-24. Following the decision of the boroughs not to reconstitute the London rates pooling arrangement in 2024-25, we are proposing to continue with the current localised pooling scheme with the same participants. The scheme is forecast to deliver the Council significant financial benefit, of between £1.6m to £2m. The proposed scheme is set out

in detail in Appendix 1 together with the detailed recommendations which require approval for Hackney to participate in the pool and Cabinet is asked to approve these.

Cost of Living Crisis

- 2.10 As the Council feels the pressure of rising inflation and interest rates, and increased fuel costs, so do our residents. Hackney already had high levels of poverty and this worsened during the pandemic, and now poverty is entrenching and more people are falling into difficulty. The cost of living crisis disproportionately impacts lower income groups, as more of their income goes on essential costs.
- 2.11 Tackling Poverty has been a key priority for the Council in recent years and we adopted a poverty reduction framework in March 2022. This was informed by work during the pandemic when we tried, from the outset, to focus our response on how those on lower incomes were going to be impacted and campaigning for more funding. We have continued to work closely with the community organisations at the heart of the pandemic response because we always knew more people would be struggling financially coming out of the pandemic.
- 2.12 The response to the cost of living crisis, which is set out below, is in line with the third objective of the poverty reduction framework which is about responding to material needs, by developing a more coordinated emergency support and advice offer, with more preventative help, linking emergency support with income maximisation and advice and supporting frontline services and community partners on the ground who are best placed to support residents. Ultimately we are trying to create one connected system of support, with the Council, statutory partners and community organisations working together.
- 2.13 The Council has established the Money Hub - a team of specialist advisors who will support those in severe hardship, who have no other source of monetary support available. In terms of the financial support the Council is able to offer to residents through the Hub, we have the Hackney Discretionary Crisis Support Scheme (HDCSS), which provides one-off payments for emergencies and items that are difficult to budget for. In addition, we also support residents having temporary difficulty meeting housing costs through the discretionary housing payments (DHPs) and have the Council Tax Reduction Discretionary Fund, which allocates out a small cash limited fund to provide discretionary financial help for council tax payers in hardship. Finally the Hub is allocating out £475k of Household Support Fund monies (see below for detail on the Housing Support Fund).
- 2.14 As well as paying out discretionary funds, the Money Hub works to increase benefits take-up and connect residents with other financial support, including providing housing navigation support and signposting to debt advice. So far:

- 7,500 residents requested support since the team launched in November 2022. More than half of applicants are already in rent or Council Tax arrears.
- The team has distributed £1m of discretionary funds, and delivered £1.32m worth of increased incomes through benefits uptake work, mainly through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS), Housing Benefit, Universal Credit and Pension Credit.
- The team is delivering a positive in year return on Investment: £1.49 worth of increased incomes for every £1 invested in staffing. This rises to £1: £2.47 over a three year period. We will be continuing to monitor the Return on Investment and we expect that this will rise further.

2.15 On funding distributed from the various funds, thus far we have made the following payments:

- *CTRS Discretionary Hardship Scheme - £17k paid out*
- *Discretionary Housing Payments - £406k paid out*
- *Hackney Discretionary Crisis Support Scheme - £117k paid out*

2.16 Government has awarded a total of £5.6m of Household Support Funding (HSF) from April 2023 to March 2024. The focus remains on emergency support although there is now some ability to fund the following initiatives:

Children and families 0-19

Total allocation: £3,099,000

Rationale:

- An estimated 32,786 (48%) children in Hackney are living in poverty (on household incomes of less than £14,000) after housing costs are deducted.
- An estimated 49% of children in poverty live in families where the youngest child is aged 4 or under (total population estimated 20,000)
- There are an estimated 25,000 people in the Orthodox Jewish community and 11,000 (44%) are under 14 and 6,600 (60%) live in households in receipt of benefits, although a very low number claim free school meals even in maintained schools (1% compared with 32% overall).

Vulnerable people known to the Council

Total allocation: £879,900

Rationale:

There are groups of people identified in the Poverty Reduction Framework and analysis of risks and needs, who the Council is able

to reach directly. These groups include: residents in temporary and supported accommodation (TA/SA), disabled adults and their unpaid carers, foster carers, Special Guardians, Shared Lives Carers and Children in Need.

Breaking down the barriers to reach a wider group of vulnerable residents who are at risk of poverty

Total allocation: £1,406,946

Rationale

There are a wide range of groups identified in the Poverty Reduction Framework and analysis of risks who we need to reach, and, in some cases, they face multiple barriers to accessing help, such as learning disability or language needs, or they would not access help from the Council because of stigma or lack of trust in statutory services.

We need to ensure that a mixed economy approach is taken so we can maximise reach into diverse communities. This means that a range of routes are being employed to reach residents with a financial help offer, as outlined below:

Money Hub £520,946 Government requires us to maintain an open application route to local Household Support Fund (HSF) spend - we are delivering this through Money Hub. This is being spent on food and fuel vouchers to residents in need - 12% of those who have received a voucher have also increased their benefits income through support from the Money Hub.

From Quarter 3, an additional £70,000 has been allocated to the Money Hub to support households moving into social housing from temporary accommodation with large household items.

Income maximisation advice £80,000 The Money Hub team employs two advice workers to enable residents to maximise their incomes by claiming benefits they are entitled to.

Trusted referral partners £241,000 - The **direct referral route for frontline workers from across sectors enables us** to reach residents in need who are least likely to contact a Council helpline, and offer timely support.

Hackney Giving £240,000 - Grant funding community organisations who are set up to deliver financial help to residents enables us to tap into the community reach that grassroots organisations have and offer timely support on the ground.

Community infrastructure organisations £75,000

Grant funding community organisations who will be able to deliver food/fuel help as well as advice to the community.

Citizens Advice £70,000 - Citizens advice will deliver help with fuel costs through the scheme they have already been running in HSF 2 and HSF 3. Residents will be able to top up their metres with a voucher or get a cash alternative if not using a metre.

Food Banks and low cost shops £140,000

We are also retaining 6% toward administration, management, grant management and monitoring, as this is becoming more difficult to sustain across Here to Help (Income Maximisation) and the Policy and Strategic Delivery Teams.

2.17 Our November 2022 OFP report identified a further £600k to support poverty reduction. The team has distributed £1m of discretionary funds, and delivered £1.32m worth of increased incomes through benefits uptake work. The focus is on either developmental interventions or those that meet the needs of groups that Household Support Fund cannot support, and specifically those with no recourse to public funds In summary resources will support:

- £300k - Tackling Food Poverty in Schools: A task group **has reviewed food poverty affecting children in schools**. The task group has listened to schools and community organisations to inform thinking about how we might expand the Free School Meals offer in a financially sustainable way to a wider group of children and look at models that reduce unit cost, improve quality, but do not simply rely upon Councils picking up the funding. The task group produced a report outlining practical measures for use of the £300k allocation. The announcement that the Mayor of London will be funding universal free school meals for the 2023/24 academic year in primary schools is welcomed and will compliment our work
- Money Hub support: topping up grant funding support for in home appliances and investing further in income maximisation officers
- Hardship support and preventative help for those who have no recourse to public funds - this £65k scheme was launched in September.

2.18 Alongside the direct support that the Council is putting in place, we are doing what we can to support organisations on the ground, who are struggling with rising costs and demands. This is vitally important because it is these organisations that have the greatest reach into diverse communities, can ensure that residents are supported in a more ongoing way at community level, and can access *independent* advice and accredited financial, debt and legal advice when appropriate. For example:

- We worked in partnership with Food Hubs to bring in £170k over three years. We supported the Hackney Food Bank to apply for GLA funding to employ a Coordinator for the Hackney Food Network and

are now supporting further fundraising to make the best use of surplus food.

3. Recommendations

3.1 To approve the 2024-25 Local London Business Rates Pool recommendations set out in Appendix 1

3.2 To note the overall financial position of the Council as at September 2023 as set out in this report.

4. Reasons for Decision

4.1 To facilitate financial management and control of the Council's finances and to approve the localised pool proposal as set out in Appendix 1.

5.0 Details of Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

5.1 This budget monitoring report is primarily an update on the Council's financial position. With regards to the Pooling proposal we either enter into it or we don't, and if we don't we will forgo a significant amount of income in 2024-25.

6.0 Background

6.1 Policy Context

This report describes the Council's financial position as at the end of September 2023. Full Council agreed the 2023/24 budget on 1st March 2023.

6.2 Equality Impact Assessment

Equality impact assessments are carried out at budget setting time and included in the relevant reports to Cabinet. Such details are not repeated in this report.

6.3 Sustainability and Climate Change

As above.

6.4 Consultations

Relevant consultations have been carried out in respect of the forecasts contained within this report involving the Cabinet Member for Finance, Insourcing and Customer Service, Heads and Directors of Finance and Service Directors through liaison with Finance Heads, Directors and Teams.

6.5 Risk Assessment

The risks associated with the Council's financial position are detailed in this report.

7. Comments of the Interim Group Director of Finance

7.1 The Interim Group Director of Finance financial considerations are included throughout the report.

8. Comments of the Acting Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services

8.1 The Interim Group Director of Finance is the officer designated by the Council as having the statutory responsibility set out in section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972. The section 151 officer is responsible for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs.

8.2 In order to fulfil these statutory duties and legislative requirements the Section 151 Officer will:

- (i) Set appropriate financial management standards for the Council which comply with the Council's policies and proper accounting practices and monitor compliance with them.
- (ii) Determine the accounting records to be kept by the Council.
- (iii) Ensure there is an appropriate framework of budgetary management and control.
- (iv) Monitor performance against the Council's budget and advise upon the corporate financial position.

8.3 Under the Council's Constitution, although Full Council sets the overall budget, it is the Cabinet that is responsible for putting the Council's policies into effect and responsible for most of the Council's decisions. The Cabinet must take decisions in line with the Council's overall policies and budget.

8.4 Paragraph 2.6.3 of FPR2 Financial Planning and Annual Estimates states that each Group Director in charge of a revenue budget shall monitor and control Directorate expenditure within their approved budget and report progress against their budget through the Overall Financial Position (OFP) Report to Cabinet. This Report is submitted to Cabinet under such provision.

8.5 Article 13.6 of the Constitution (Part Two) states that key decisions can be taken by the Elected Mayor alone, the Executive collectively, individual Cabinet Members and officers. Under the Mayor's Scheme of Delegation financial matters are reserved to Cabinet, therefore, this report is being submitted to Cabinet for approval.

8.6 All other legal implications have been incorporated within the body of this report.

9. Children and Education

Revised Budget	Service Area	Forecast Variance After reserves
£k		£000
94,996	Children and Education	3,179

9.1 Children and Families Services (CFS) are forecasting a £3.179m overspend as at the end of September 2023 after the application of reserves totalling £3.9m and after the inclusion of the Social Care Grant allocation of £13m. The forecast has increased by £0.6m since August driven mainly within Corporate parenting due to an increase in client numbers but also an increase in the cost of a number of placements due to increasing provider rates, although rate increases are always challenged, annual increases to unit costs do have to be negotiated and agreed.

9.2 As has been the practice since the grant was announced in 2019/20, the Social Care Grant for both children's and adult social care has been split equally across both services. In 2023/24 the grant was increased by a further £1.5bn nationally, Hackney's allocation is a total of £26.7m this year, which represents a £9.7m increase from 2022/23. Except for a specific Independent Living Fund element of £0.7m which has been allocated to Adult Social Care, the remaining £26m has been equally shared between Children's Services and Adult Social Care.

9.3 There is a gross budget pressure in staffing across CFS of £1m. In 2023/24 corporate savings of £500k have been agreed with a further £500k to be delivered in 2024/25. The service is working towards implementing these proposed changes to the structure from January 2024 via a review of services that will achieve the following:

- Provide best outcomes for children and families
- Enhance the development of the service
- Protect front line practice
- Simplify and provide clearer management oversight
- Creating career development opportunities for staff
- Ensure service resilience and meet business continuity requirements
- Provide cost savings

9.4 The main areas of pressure in CFS continue to be in Corporate Parenting which is forecast to overspend by £3.2m after the use of £1.2m commissioning reserves. Since 2019/20, we have monitored unit costs in different placements types and have seen them significantly increase during this period. This is illustrated in the table below.

Unit Costs	LAC Residential Average		Independent Fostering Average		LAC Semi Independent Average		LC Semi Independent Average	
	Per Week	No. of Young People	Per Week	No. of Young People	Per Week	No. of Young People	Per Week	No. of Young People
2019-20	£3,725	32	£967	143	£1,211	41	£390	104
2020-21	£3,979	35	£987	126	£1,309	36	£529	103
2021-22	£5,399	35	£1,080	131	£1,667	40	£515	166
2022-23	£6,346	30	£1,241	114	£1,996	35	£558	162
2023-24 (at period 5)	£6,122	29	£1,348	114	£2,618	43	£543	96
% increase over 5 year period	64%		39%		116%		39%	

9.5 The increase in unit costs has been coupled with a relative increase in the profile of placements linked to the complexity of care for children and young people coming into the service. For example children with very complex mental health needs, which can carry a constant risk of self harm and require round the clock supervision. In addition restricted supply nationally coupled with higher demand results in an extremely competitive market for placements, which drives up costs. At the start of 2023/24 we saw a reduction in residential placements, however placement costs are increasing in residential care and semi-independent placements due to care providers being faced with the challenges of rising inflation linked to the cost of living crisis. The forecast has increased by £0.8m since August due to an increase in individual placements in a very challenging market. The forecast generally increases over the summer period due to education provisions finishing for the year leading to children and young people having less structured times. This, combined with carers having holiday plans makes finding new care arrangements particularly challenging leading to the use of more expensive residential homes rather than foster care. As care arrangements settle and as schools resume we would expect the forecast to shift downwards in the Autumn, and this shift downwards has already been factored in and will be monitored during the next few months. The forecast is susceptible to variation due to the demand-led nature of the service and the complexity of the arrangements for new clients can add a considerable cost.

9.6 The Family Intervention Support Services is showing an overspend of £0.4m which is related to over established posts and agency staff, as well as higher spend in LAC incidental costs.

- 9.7 The Access and Assessment and Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub have an overspend of £0.2m primarily related to increased staffing costs from over established staff and agency.
- 9.8 Looked After Children & Leaving Care Services are expected to overspend by £0.4m, and this relates to an increase in commissioning costs and some staffing cost pressures linked to additional posts and agency staff usage to respond to increasing demands in the service.
- 9.9 The Workforce Development Board has a rolling Social Worker recruitment process which should address the agency premium costs, providing the successful permanent appointment of candidates. Competition for social workers, particularly in London, is challenging. This applies both in permanent and agency recruitment. Local authorities are now frequently offering 'golden handshakes' and 'retention bonuses' along with promises of competitive salaries, career development opportunities and a variety of other benefits.
- 9.10 The Disabled Children Services is showing an overspend of £0.1m, and this primarily relates to the demand in short break services which is a statutory requirement.
- 9.11 The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance services are showing an overspend of £0.2m. The quality assurance and improvement team and the safeguarding and reviewing team both have staffing overspends primarily related to agency premium, maternity and long term sickness cover pressures.
- 9.12 **Hackney Education (HE)** Hackney Education (HE) is forecast to overspend by around £4.317m in 2023/24. The underlying overspend across the service is £5.447m, and this is partially offset by mitigating underspends of £1.130m. The main driver is a £4.836m pressure in SEND as a result of a continuing increase in recent years of children and young people with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs), and this increase is predicted to continue in 2023/24. The forecast has been reviewed at the midpoint in the year based on trend and reduced by £0.5m from the previous month. Discussions with Newton Europe/CIPFA, who are working on behalf of the Department of Education (DfE) and the development of a grant application to secure £1m through the SEND Developing Better Value (DBV) programme have continued in 2023/24. The process started in February 2023 and the now approved grant application includes an action plan to spend the £1m allocation towards targeted workstreams which may help to mitigate some elements of the high needs budget pressures which have contributed towards year on year overspends.
- 9.13 **SEND** is forecasting a £975K budget pressure in 2023/24 due to increased activity coupled with continuing increases in fuel prices and transport costs (this is included in the overall £4.836m overspend above). Given the volatility seen in fuel prices since last financial year, this area will continue

to be monitored closely. Other areas of overspend are within School Standards and Performance (£5k) and Early Years which includes Children's Centres (£565K), and reduced income levels are expected to continue within our Early Years service as a result of lower activity levels within services, that has been the pattern post-pandemic. There has also been a change in legislation which means previously traded services for attendance and specialist intervention provided to schools are now required to be delivered free of charge.

9.14 **Outcomes, Business Intelligence & Strategy (OBIS) directorate** - the OBIS directorate has been formed with a mandate to drive transformation across Children and Education. There are two main service areas in OBIS – the Education Operations team and the OBIS Transformation team. There are four priority programmes currently in place which are planned to yield significant benefit for the organisation. These include:

- Creating a universal practice model informed by STAR principles. The aim of this work is to develop and embed a new practice model across Children & Education teams.
- Transforming our existing monitoring, supporting and improving services across C&E.
- Reviewing our traded services and increasing revenue generation.
- Realising the benefits of the recent restructure across our Education Operations team ensuring that the short, medium and long term operational support that is provided to schools, settings and the Education directorate is of a consistently high quality.

The OBIS directorate is expected to break even after the use of £0.5m reserves specifically set aside for the transformation programme. Funding for beyond 2023/24 needs to be identified from existing resources within Children and Education.

9.15 **The Savings/Vacancy Factor** Savings for Children's Services and Education in 2023/24 include £250k through the consolidation of the Children, Education and Health commissioning functions which will allow more effective market engagement and more effective joint commissioning; and £500k from a review of the Children and Families staffing structure which is expected to be in place from January 2024. A further £650k has been delivered through a wide-range of targeted and specialist interventions for young people that need extra support, as well as a range of play and sports opportunities on a universal basis, including through Youth Hubs and adventure playgrounds. The £650k is an addition to £350k of savings in 2022/23 from our early help services. All savings are currently forecast to be delivered this year.

9.16 A vacancy rate savings target of £1.7m has been set for the directorate in 2023/24 (£0.9m for Children and Families and £0.8m for Education) and the forecast assumes that this will be achieved or mitigated within respective service budgets. Progress against the target is carefully monitored and

tracked by the C&E Senior Management Team and this will continue to be monitored closely and reported through this monthly finance report.

- 9.17 Many of the **financial risks** to the service that were present in 2022-23 have continued into 2023-24.

One of the main risks for the directorate is the cost of living and fuel price crisis, and the potential impact that it will have on the cost of service delivery going forward. It is difficult to estimate the impact that the cost of living crisis will have across services, however we can expect care providers to seek greater inflationary uplifts to care placements than in previous years and this has had an impact in the movement in September's forecast. In Education, the trend data does illustrate that taxi fares within SEND transport are experiencing increased rates for journeys.

SEND - there is also uncertainty around the DSG high needs deficit and the treatment of any deficit post 2025/26. The brought forward SEND deficit in 2023/24 is circa £17.1m, based on current forecasts this will increase to circa £21.4m by the end of this financial year. The statutory override which allowed this deficit balance to be carried in the Council's accounts has been extended from 31 March 2023 to 31 March 2026 by Government. However, this continues to remain a long term risk for Hackney in the event there is no further funding provided by the Department for Education (DfE) to mitigate this balance. As stated earlier in this report Hackney is included in Tranche 2 of the Delivering Better Value (in SEND) programme which aims to help local authorities maintain effective SEND services, however the programme aims to provide assistance on deficit recovery actions/mitigations through a grant of up to £1m, rather than provide direct funding to address the deficit, hence the potential risk to the Council. The grant application has been successful and will be received in October 2023.

Early Years - The National reform of the free early years entitlement is expected to have a significant impact on demand for childcare placements, with the greatest shift expected to be for two year olds 30 hours care. There is likely to be significantly more demand for childcare through the proposed reform, specifically for two year olds. Further funding details are awaited and implementation of the reforms will commence from September 2024, the scale of the potential impact is to be assessed when further details are available.

- 9.18 In addition to budgeted savings further cost reduction measures have been developed for 2023/24.

For CFS, management actions of £1.5m have been identified and these have been factored into the forecast. These include reductions in the number of high cost placements (£0.5m); review of the top 30 high cost placements (£0.3m); a Foster First Approach (£0.5m); and review of agency spend through maximising permanent recruitment and greater challenge through the workforce development board (£0.2m).

For Hackney Education, the focus of cost reduction measures this year will be through further development of in-borough SEND provision and reviewing SEND transport eligibility. Detailed plans continue to be developed for these proposals, and these will be part of discussion alongside the deficit recovery plans being developed with the DfE and CIPFA.

10. Adult, Health and Integration

Revised Budget	Service Area	Forecast Variance After reserves
£k		£000
126,025	Adults, Health and Integration	8,966

- 10.1 Adult Social Care is forecasting an overspend of £8.966m (2022/23 outturn position was £7.7m) after the application of reserves of £5m and the inclusion of the Social Care Grant allocation of £13.7m.
- 10.2 As has been the practice since the Social Care Grant was announced in 2019/20, the grant allocation for both children's and adult social care has been split equally across both services. This financial year the grant was increased by a further £1.5bn nationally and this has meant the Council has received a total of £26.7m, which represents a £9.7m increase on the previous year. Children's Services have been allocated £13m and Adult Social Care have each been allocated £13.7m (including the Independent Living Fund £0.7m, now rolled into Social Care grant in 23/24) respectively, and this has been fully factored into the current forecast.
- 10.3 In 2023-24, the Government introduced the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF) designed to support local authorities to make improvements in adult social care capacity, services and market sustainability. The MSIF Grant is payable in 2023-24 and 2024-25. In total, the fund amounted to £400 million of new funding for adult social care in 2023-24. There is a further £683 million expected in 2024-25. In 2023-24, the MSIF funding was combined with £162 million of continued Fair Cost of Care funding rolled forward from 2022-23 to yield a total allocation of £562m. Hackney's 2023-24 MSIF grant allocation was £3.3m. The Government has now announced that an additional £600m will be provided to adult social care across 2023-24 and 2024-25. £570m will be payable in 2023-24 and 2024-25 through the new MSIF Workforce Fund (£365m in 2023-24 and £205m in 2024-25). The remaining £30m of the announced funding will be paid to "local authorities in the most challenged health systems". Hackney's share of the £365m grant in 2023-24 is £2.1m.
- 10.4 Local authorities will be able to decide how they choose to focus the funding, in line with local circumstances and priorities but the Statement does draw attention to the same target areas of improvement that are set out for the MSIF.

These are:

- increasing fee rates paid to adult social care providers in local areas
- increasing adult social care workforce capacity and retention
- reducing adult social care waiting times

- 10.5 Adult Social Services in Hackney is already taking action and pursuing initiatives to support the workforce and provide more capacity within the adult social care sector. The current MSIF funding has been used primarily to support provider fee uplifts based on the Fair Cost of Care exercise completed in 2022, as well as allocating funding towards helping to reduce social care waiting times. This additional round of MSIF funding will continue to help fund these initiatives and any necessary expansion.
- 10.6 The forecast continues to be adversely impacted by the challenging situation on a number of fronts. Firstly, there has been increased demand, particularly from hospital discharge for people requiring ongoing social care, and also due to mitigations required to be in place to manage the risk to vulnerable adults as a result of recent strike action by NHS staff. This includes significant increases in care package costs to allow care agencies to manage increased risk in the community, additional funding invested in securing taxi transportation for clients to and from hospital in the place of ambulance services, additional commissioned step down and care home placements to help the hospital manage flow, and an increase in staffing to support the hospital with discharge. This increase in demand, and consequent increase in cost to Adult Social Care is predicted to continue for at least for the next quarter. The Discharge Fund from the DLUHC has provided a grant of £2.3 million for the 23/24 period. However, it's important to note that this funding is specifically designated for additional initiatives aimed at facilitating discharges. It does not address the substantial rise in expenses and demand associated with ongoing care packages. Secondly, there is increasing demand and complexity coming from the community, including new adults requiring long term care, due to deterioration in health or circumstances, higher prevalence of severe mental ill health in Hackney compared to other authorities, and multiple intersecting complexities, including substance use and trauma.
- 10.7 **Care Support Commissioning** is the service area with the most significant budget pressure in Adult Social Care with a £6.3m budget pressure (after reserve usage of £2.7m) against an overall budget of £47m. The position has moved adversely by £0.4m compared to the previously reported position, driven by increases in long term care costs (Nursing +£0.3m, Home Care +£0.5m & Supported Living +£0.1m) partially offset by MSIF (round 2) grant funding of £0.5m this month. The increased cost of care continues to be primarily driven by growth in new clients as well as increased complexity of care needs for existing service users. The service records the costs of long term care for service users including their primary support reason, and the budget overspend reflects both the growth in client activity and increasing complexity of care provision being commissioned. The service has seen a 30% increase in the total number of people

receiving care and support since 2019/20. For some services such as home care, the increase is even more significant (43%). In addition to rising demand, unit costs have also increased significantly since 2019/20 due to inflationary pressures including London Living Wage (LLW) coupled with greater complexity of care in care packages. The ASC budget faces mounting challenges due to both escalating demand and growing costs, which together exert significant pressure on the overall service budget. The tables below illustrate both the rise in demand, and increase in unit costs:

ASC Demand 2019/20 v 2022/23

	2019/20	2022/23	% increase
Overall number of ASC service users	2610	3390	30%
Home care provided (hours)	915,297	1,312,959	43%
Residential care (number of placements)	619	626	1%
Supported living (number of placements)	305	398	30%

Snapshot Unit costs trend

Service type	2019/20			2022/23			% Change in Unit Cost
	# of Service Users/ Hours	Avg unit cost (£)	Total cost (£m)	# of Service Users/ Hours	Avg unit cost (£)	Total cost (£m)	
Home care*	915,297	17.97	16.45	1,312,959	19.16	25.16	7%
Supported Living	279	911	13.79	342	1,241	21.83	36%
Residential	347	970	18.75	388	1,068	21.56	10%
Nursing	157	766	6.72	155	879	7.83	15%

10.8 The council and North East London Integrated Care Board were allocated discharge funding (£2.3m and £1.1m respectively) for 2023-24 for Hackney. From this overall allocation, £1m of discharge funding has been allocated to support the cost of care packages and to enable the efficient discharge of people from hospital, of which £0.4m is currently in the forecast. The overall funding received in relation to supporting care package costs from discharge funds has reduced by £0.8m compared to the previous year. The ICB also contributes a total of £9.2m of funding towards health care costs for service users with learning disabilities as part of the integrated commissioning arrangements with the council.

10.9 **Provided services** are forecast to overspend by £1.7m against a £10.3m budget. This represents a £0.1m favourable movement compared to the

August position, due to a reduction in staffing costs through rationalising agency usage and sickness management. The £1.7m overspend is made up primarily of an overspend on Housing with Care (HwC) scheme costs of £2.5m, offset by underspends on day services of £0.8m. This HwC forecast overspend of £2.5m reflects both the impact of £1m of undelivered savings from 21-22 and 22-23, as well as high levels of staff sickness and the service engaging agency staff to cover these roles alongside additional capacity required to maintain the service. The service is currently undertaking a number of management actions to address both the high level of sickness and agency staff usage, this includes working closely with HR, and Occupational health to reduce sickness levels, medically retiring staff that are no longer able to work, addressing the issues relating to staff members who are on reduced capacity due to medical conditions, as well as offering fixed term contracts to long term agency staff to reduce the dependency on agency usage. The majority of the day service underspend of £0.8m is from the Oswald Street day centre which continues with a limited number of service users as a result of maintenance work needed for the ventilation at the premises. A capital bid for the work required at Oswald Street was submitted, and agreed by the June 23 Cabinet. Currently there is a delay in the maintenance work commencing due to the fact that the planning application submitted has yet to be approved. Once approved works should commence in the latter part of the year.

- 10.10 **Mental health** is forecast to overspend by £1.2m against a £8.6m budget. There is negligible movement compared to the previous report position. The Mental Health budget overspend is primarily attributed to an overspend on externally commissioned mental health care services. Adult Services continue to work in collaboration with East London Foundation Trust to reduce the budget overspend as part of the agreed cost reduction measures.
- 10.11 **Preventative Services** reflects a £0.2m budget underspend against a budget of £7.6m. This is primarily due to the Interim bed facility at Leander Court (£0.2m) experiencing lower than expected demand for these services.
- 10.12 The **Care Management and Adult Divisional Support's** budget position is an overall underspend of £0.4m, which is primarily due to staff vacancies across the ASC management team, as a result of delays in recruitment.
- 10.13 The **ASC commissioning** budget position reflects a £0.1m budget overspend, a favourable movement of £0.03m compared to the previous reported position, driven by a reduction in locum staff costs as agency contracts have ceased. The ASC commissioning position also includes one-off funding of £0.8m which is supporting various activities across commissioning. This includes additional staff capacity across the Brokerage Team, Direct Payment teams, and funding of extracare services at Limetrees and St Peters. The forecast also includes £1.4m of Discharge Funds (from the £2.3m LBH, £1.1m ICB total allocations), which is

supporting the funding of various hospital discharge facilities including interim accommodation and nursing care block placements.

10.14 This directorate is coordinating the council response for the support required for Refugees, Migrants and Asylum Seekers, including the Homes for Ukraine scheme, Afghan Resettlement schemes, as well as asylum seekers residing in the Borough in Home Office accommodation. There is Government support for the costs being incurred under these schemes and so no cost pressure is currently forecasted. However there is uncertainty about the level of funding we will receive to support Refugees (including Ukrainians), Migrants and Asylum Seekers in future years.

10.15 **Public Health** Public Health (PH) is forecasting a breakeven position. The Grant funding allocation for local authorities in 2023/24 has risen to £3.5 billion nationally, representing a 3.3% cash terms increase compared to the previous year's allocation. Hackney's share of the increased allocation is £1.1 million. The 2023/24 grant includes an adjustment to cover the cost of implementing the Botulinum Toxin and Cosmetic Fillers (Children) Act 2021 (our allocation is £15k). The 2023/24 grant will continue to be subject to conditions, including a ring-fence requiring local authorities to use the grant to deliver public health outcomes. This may include public health challenges arising directly or indirectly from the legacy impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure the allocated Public Health budget is managed effectively, demand-led services, such as sexual health, are carefully monitored by the service. This monitoring process aims to maintain service provision within the allocated budget for the current and future financial years.

The Hackney Mortuary position reflects a £0.2m budget overspend, primarily attributable to ongoing cost pressures in relation to the council's contribution towards the coroner's costs.

10.16 Adult Social Care has **Savings** of £1.4m to deliver in 2023/24. Savings related to efficiencies of housing related support contracts (£650k), housing related support review (£194k), ASC commissioning (£100k), increased care charging (£250k) and Daycare review (£200k). All of these savings are on track to be delivered this financial year, and are factored into the forecast. There still remains £1m of undelivered savings from previous years in relation to the Housing with Care service 2021/22 (£0.5m) and 2022/23 (£0.5m). In previous years these savings have been mitigated by efficiencies across our Housing related Support contracts, but currently there is real cost pressure of £1m.

10.17 **A vacancy rate savings** target of £0.3m has been set for the directorate in 2023-24. The forecast assumes that this will be achieved or mitigated within respective service budgets. Progress against the target is carefully monitored by the AH&I Senior Management Team and reported through this monthly finance report.

- 10.18 Many of the financial risks to the service that were present in 2022-23 continue into 2023-24. Following the recovery of the social care system (Mosaic) in November 2022, further work is ongoing to develop the system further, including improving important case management functionality. The majority of care package information has now been loaded on to Mosaic and the service teams are following up to ensure that all information is up to date and correct. However, until this task is completed and the data verified we cannot be certain that we are fully capturing and monitoring the cost of any additional demand for care. The service is working proactively to ensure that packages are loaded accurately and in a timely manner.
- 10.19 One of the main risks for the directorate is the ongoing cost of living and fuel price crisis, and the potential impact that it will have on the cost of service delivery going forward. It is difficult to estimate the impact that the cost of living crisis will have across services, however we can expect care providers to seek greater inflationary uplifts to care placements than in previous years. Inflation rates are currently 6.7% as at August 2023, and this not only presents challenges to the Council but also to care providers.
- 10.20 The current forecast includes only existing service users and does not include any potential costs arising from additional demand above estimated initial demographic growth assumptions. Actual care costs have risen by £7m per year on average over the last 5 years. The table below illustrates the year on year increase on external commissioned care spend.

Gross Outturn - External care commissioned services

	2018-19 (£m):	2019-20 (£m):	2020-21 (£m):	2021-22 (£m):	2022-23 (£m):
Total Outturn	58.9	65.3	72.5	77.9	87.8
Movement on Previous Year	5.8	6.4	7.2	5.4	9.9
% Increase on Previous Year	11.0%	10.9%	11.1%	7.5%	12.7%

10.21 Management Actions to reduce the overspend

In addition to budgeted savings, further cost reduction measures have been developed for 2023/24. For Adult Social Care, management actions of £1.25m have been identified and these are factored into the forecast. These include continuation of the multi-disciplinary panel process (£0.25m); double-handed care package review (£0.2m); direct payment monitoring of accounts (£0.1m); review of agency spend through tighter controls with Head of Service and greater challenge through the Workforce Development Board (£0.1m); working with ELFT to manage the Mental Health overspend (£0.35m) and a commissioning review team (£0.25m).

11.0 Climate, Homes and Economy

Revised Budget	Service Area	Forecast Variance After reserves
£k		£000
33.803	Climate, Homes and Economy	849

- 11.1 The directorate is showing a £0.849m overspend after the use of £3.53m in reserves. There is no material movement from the August 2023 reported position. The directorate's main areas of underlying overspend are Environmental Operations, Community Safety, Enforcement and Business Regulation (CSEBR) and Streetscene.
- 11.2 Previous OFP reports to Cabinet detailed how the Directorate Leadership Team has worked with the finance team to take actions to reduce spend and increase income. This yielded an in-year cost reduction of £1.2m reflected which arose from holding uncommitted budgets on non staff budget lines, factoring income which is exceeding budgets into the forecast and forecasting underspend on budgets to deliver manifesto and other commitments due to delays in recruiting staff.
- 11.3 All possible levers to call underspends have been considered. This is a continually moving picture and the position will change over the coming months. We are introducing monitoring processes to ensure that the saving forecast can be fully delivered but accept that there are items of expenditure that are essential, such as equipment replacement, and will need to happen to deliver services that may well reduce the forecast saving. In the same way a downward trend in income will impact what we have forecast this month. All Heads of Service in the directorate are aware of the financial challenge facing the Council and will use their best endeavours to deliver the cost reductions.
- 11.4 The net overspend for Environmental Operations (EO) and Environment Strategy & Recycling (EWS) is £1.346m. The projected overspend in EO of £1.436m which is partially offset by an underspend of £0.090m in EWS, is due to a range of demand-driven challenges, including housing growth, population increases (including temporary influxes), responding to the aftermath of ASB, and emergency responses, all of which have put strain on current resources. Inflation and the cost of living crises have had an additional impact on the service, particularly in the areas of vehicle maintenance and increased consumable expenses, such as PPE and receptacles (sacks and bins).
- 11.5 Other priorities in terms of addressing the climate emergency, mitigation and adaptation, have also had an influence on the service budget, the combination of which has implications for the operation of our street cleaning function. This is both in terms of how resources are allocated and additional time taken to cleanse areas.
- 11.6 The principal cost pressures within the service are as follows:

- £0.687m - overspend relating to the impact of increased demand on the service; Since 2013 Hackney has seen household numbers rise by 13,530; this increase in households and the waste they produce has, up until last year, been absorbed into existing rounds and other services as far as possible. This demand pressure has also resulted in more non-funded services, such as responsive cleansing of the highways and estates, night time economy cleansing; being delivered to maintain our cleanliness standards across the public realm. However, this increased pressure on services for both refuse collection and street cleansing can no longer be contained within the existing budgets.
 - £0.562m - non delivery of previously approved vacancy factor savings. This saving approved in 2021/22 is proving increasingly difficult to deliver especially given the increased pressure on the services as outlined above.
 - £0.350m - non delivery of the saving relating to the establishment of the Commercial Waste company. Due to the impact of the pandemic there was a delay in establishing the company and this saving was to be delivered in year 3 following the establishment of the Company. We are just entering year 2 and therefore this saving will not be achieved until 2024/25.
 - £0.268m - due to the impact of inflation on material purchasing such as refuse bins and refuse sacks and the cost of a route optimisation system.
- 11.7 The overall overspend of £1.931m is being mitigated in part by steps offered by the Head of Service, which results in £0.496m of savings and reduces the overspend to £1.436m. These have been implemented from October 2023 and this is reflected in this month's forecast. These recommendations should have little effect on service delivery and performance. The Head of Service will continuously analyse service budgets to seek cost-cutting possibilities in order to reduce overspend while maintaining existing levels of service.
- 11.8 **Community Safety, Enforcement and Business Regulation** is projected to overspend by £0.201m. The overspend relates to the service's continued need to generate vacancy factor savings, which is proving difficult in this vital front-line service. The Head of Service continues to evaluate budget lines in order to uncover opportunities to contain spend.
- 11.9 **Leisure, Parks & Green Spaces** are forecasting a small overspend of £0.015m, but there is a risk that the water charges may be a problem where the utilities companies are trying to locate the exact position of an underground water leak on Hackney Marshes.
- 11.10 **Economy, Regeneration & New Homes** There is a £0.223m underspend forecast for the service. The forecast underspend is due to the actions taken by management to hold unspent non staff budgets, mainly within the Area Regeneration and Economic Development, to mitigate the Council's forecast overspend. Private Sector Housing (PSH) is forecasting an

underachievement in income arising from enforcement notices and inspection fees of £0.140m and licence fee income of £0.072m which has been mitigated by an underspend in staffing budgets due to the delay in appointing Environmental Health Officers to deliver the commitment to enhance the Council's response to Damp and Mould in the private rented sector. There is a further risk relating to PSH licensing income, with the old scheme coming to an end in October 2023 and a new scheme not expected to be rolled out until the 2024/25 financial year. There currently appears to be enough in the PSH licensing reserve to cover this gap, but this also depends on what income is received for the last few months of the current scheme. This risk will be mitigated by use of the reserve funding.

- 11.11 **Employment, Skills and Adult Learning** are forecasting a small underspend of £0.039m as the majority of expenditure in Adult Learning is covered by grants.
- 11.12 **Markets** Markets and Shop Front Trading are showing a £0.180m underspend, representing a £0.175m positive movement from August 2023. This adjustment is related to a modification of the income forecast, which is likely to exceed the budgeted target as a result of new initiatives such as Sunday trading at Broadway Market. This is despite the Indoor Markets not being able to meet their target income for this financial year. The team responsible for the markets is actively engaging with both the contractor and the legal services to explore options for compensation due to the missed deadline.
- 11.13 **Parking** is showing an underspend of £0.158m. While parking revenue is projected to broadly balance, a significant concern is the possible inability to generate expected revenue from Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs). There are two primary reasons for this decline. Firstly is the continuous acts of vandalism directed at CCTV cameras in the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and School Streets. This situation is aggravated by the high costs of fixing and maintaining these cameras. A secondary cause is the maturation of existing CCTV schemes (where compliance has improved), and a reduction in new moving traffic restrictions being implemented. As a result, income from PCNs has dropped by approximately 30% compared to last year. Another area of concern that is emerging is parking suspension. Income over the first 5 months is down by 9% compared to the first 5 months of last year, despite inflationary price increases having been applied. The Head of Service has proposed a number of solutions to mitigate the risk posed by recurring acts of vandalism; these proposals are awaiting approval. The estimated impact and risk to the revenue projections is £1.4m which is being closely monitored.
- 11.14 **Streetscene** is projecting an overspend of £0.078m. The challenges posed by inflation and the prevailing cost of living crisis have brought about notable changes in the utilisation of services, consequently diminishing the demand for licences and associated fees. This trend is particularly evident in the context of contributions from companies such as G Network, which has reduced activity across the borough, and a reduction in the issuance of

Highways Act Licences. This marked decline in activity across the Service is due to the broader economic challenges in the wider economy.

11.15 **Planning and Regulatory Services** is forecast to underspend by £0.091m which is an adverse movement of £0.164m from August 2023 position. The movement is due to an adjustment being made to the recovery of income from Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) and what proportion of that income can be retained within Planning as there are specific conditions attached to the receipt of POCA income. There is further ongoing review being carried out in collaboration with Planning to ensure the figures forecast are robust.

11.16 **Savings/Vacancy Savings.** The directorate has achieved £2.508m of the 2023/24 savings plans of £2.858m. The Hackney Commercial Services company saving of £0.350m is being forecast as not being achieved given the company is a year behind schedule and this was a saving expected in year three of operations. The company has not established its market share base yet to deliver the 2023/24 savings target.

The vacancy factor savings agreed as part of the 2021/22 budget is not being achieved in two of the directorate services, Environmental Operations and CSEBR. The total of non delivery is £753K. The Heads of Service are reviewing services and budget lines to mitigate the impact of this non delivery. The Directorate is, though, achieving a significant proportion of its vacancy savings.

11.17 **Management Actions to reduce the overspend in 2023/24.** Heads of Services are continually reviewing their overspends and working to identify strategies to mitigate the level of overspend. Strategic Directors will review all service areas to hold non essential spend to mitigate the overspending areas. A review of non-essential spend last period resulted in forecasts being reduced by £1.2m

11.18 Risks

	Amount £'000
Decline in TfL funding impacting capitalised salaries in Streetscene - we are keeping	TBA

	Amount £'000
a watching brief	
Vehicle Maintenance cost in Environment Operations - based on expenditure in 22/23 exceeding the budget significantly. This is due, in part, to more extensive maintenance work to lengthen the life of vehicles. This is being closely monitored to pick up trends early.	510
Assumed savings from operational changes in Environmental Operations - close monitoring of the mitigating actions will be undertaken to track delivery of the savings.	500
NLWA levy for non household waste - increase in tonnage projections reported show an increase in the estimated cost for 23/24. Final 22/23 rebate from NLWA plus the estimated rebate for 23/24 has reduced the risk down to £100k from £500k.	100
Parking Income - reduction in PCN and parking suspension income due to acts of vandalism and reduced activity from companies in requesting parking bay suspensions to carry out work.	1.400
	2,510

12.0 Finance and Corporate Resources

Revised Budget	Service Area	Forecast Variance After reserves
£k		£000
25,243	Finance & Corporate Resources	1,999

- 12.1 Finance and Corporate Resources are currently forecasting an overspend of £1.999m after a reserve drawdown of £2.6m. This is an improvement of £177k on last month's forecast. The service continues to be impacted by the Cyberattack and the associated recovery work, and the cost of living crisis, with significant overspends in Revenues, Benefits and ICT totalling £2.9m
- 12.2 **Financial Management and Control** are currently forecast to budget after a reserve drawdown of £56k.
- 12.3 **Education Client** is currently forecast to budget after a reserve drawdown of £14k. The reserve funding is being used to offset the costs associated with the legal fees for the withdrawal of lifecycle funding to the VA schools. Currently, there are 4 schools that have been impacted by this decision and an external legal team has been procured to ensure that there is a resolution. It is anticipated that the costs could change and as a result, we will continue to monitor and report any changes. The overall impact is unknown, and the total overspend will be supported by reserves.
- 12.4 **Strategic Property Services** Strategic Property Services are forecasting to break even for the 2023/24 financial year after reserve movements. Commercial Property continues to be affected by the under recovery of income, this being the main budgetary pressure on the service. The Head of Commercial Estates has expressed concerns about the high risk

associated with income collection and deferred rents, considering the current fragility of the market. We continue to monitor this and it is anticipated that the pressure in this area could potentially increase. Other budgetary pressures include additional security services expenditure at the Englefield Road site and Wally Foster Community Centre in order to prevent squatting. These pressures will be mitigated by reserves set aside last year for the fluctuations in commercial property income.

12.5 **Housing Benefits** Housing Benefits are currently forecasting an overspend of £1.24m after reserve drawdown of £315k. There has been no movement on the previous month's forecast. The reason for the overspend is due to a need for additional agency staff to work on the backlog of work as part of Cyber recovery and additional demand in the service. The agency forecast is currently £2m, of which £750k is being funded from specific grant funding or absorbed by the underspend on permanent staff due to vacancies. The Net Cost of Benefit (NCOB) forecast is not currently included in the above table. Eligible error continues to be significantly higher than pre-cyber levels which poses a financial risk however it is too early to provide an accurate forecast. Once the figures have been refined the overspend will be included in the forecast

12.6 **Customer Services** are currently forecast to budget.

12.7 **Revenues** are currently forecasting an overspend of £643k. This relates to the following:

- £0.5m off-site resources required to access and process the backlog of outstanding work across Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates using the Council's existing software systems Comino (document imaging) and Academy (revenues system) due to Cyber.
- The remaining overspend relates to the ongoing need for additional staff in the Customer Services Contact Centre who are working on the increase in the level of customer calls relating to council tax and business rates.

There is a possibility that additional grant funding will be awarded to help fund new burdens within the service. If awarded, this will reduce the following months' forecasts.

12.8 **Soft Facilities Management** is currently forecast to budget.

12.9 **Support Services** is currently forecast to budget.

12.10 **Registration Services** are currently forecast to underspend by £113k. There is no movement on last month and the underspend is a result of overachieving on income targets.

12.11 **Housing Needs** are currently forecast to budget after a reserve drawdown of £983k. There has been no movement on last month's forecast. The reserve drawdown relates to grant funding received in advance. There is a

£850k agency staffing pressure as a result of the increased demand for temporary accommodation (TA) services. Since 2017/18 the number of TA approaches has increased by 65%. Currently, this can be mitigated by reductions in temporary accommodation rental spend as a result of:

- 1) Higher levels of TA placements in hostels which are the most cost effective type of accommodation within our portfolio.
- 2) Greater focus on prevention work and the reduction in the supply of temporary accommodation (especially private sector lettings) which currently means that only 30% of TA approaches will be placed in temporary accommodation.

This will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and the forecast will be updated to reflect any changes in the availability of TA properties.

12.12 **ICT** are forecasting an overspend of £666k after a reserve drawdown of £733k. The primary cause of the overspend can be attributed to the on-demand cloud computing platforms provided by Amazon Web Services (AWS). Recognising the need to address this cost pressure, management is actively working to identify strategies that will help alleviate the overspend. One such strategy involves discontinuing the utilisation of some legacy data centres. By doing so, the service aims to reduce the annual costs associated with data centre hosting and network connectivity. This step will lead to cost reductions and optimise the service's cloud infrastructure. Furthermore, a comprehensive assessment is underway to evaluate data migration and recovery efforts following the cyberattack. This assessment aims to identify areas where expenditure related to cloud hosting can be minimised without compromising data security and operational efficiency.

By implementing these measures, the service anticipates a decrease in the overspend and a more cost-effective utilisation of cloud computing resources. Additionally, it is worth noting that the service is already offsetting the overspend in the current position due to holding a number of vacant posts resulting from a recent restructure. Management is reviewing the possibility of delaying recruitment to these vacant posts to ease the budget pressure in the current financial year.

12.13 **The Audit and Anti-Fraud** service is forecasting an underspend of £149k. The overall underspend is due to the service holding vacant posts and a reduction in agency expenditure.

13.14 **Directorate Finance Support** Teams are forecasting an underspend of £159k. There has been no movement on last month's forecast.

12.15 **Procurement** is currently forecast to overspend by £9k. There has been no movement on last month's forecast. The overspend relates to the approval to award 10% market supplements on new and existing posts to increase staff retention, which is partially offset by underspends across the service.

- 12.16 **HR & OD** Human Resources and Organisational Development is currently forecast to underspend by £140k. There is no movement on last month's forecast and the forecast underspend is due to holding posts vacant for an extended period of time pending the restructure for which the DPR is imminent.
- 12.17 All of F&CR **Savings** and the **Vacancy Savings** are forecast to be achieved
- 12.18 The main areas of potential financial risks within F&R, where the forecast may see increases in the coming months are:
- Net Cost of Benefits - Loss of subsidy from Local Authority (LA) error & increase in the Bad Debt Provision (BDP).
 - Customer service costs depending on the level of demand.

13.0 **Chief Executive**

Revised Budget	Service Area	Forecast Variance After reserves
£k		£000
15,062	Chief Executive	-378

- 13.1 The Chief Executive's Directorate is forecasting an underspend of £0.378m following the use of £2.4m of reserves. This is in line with the August forecast and continues to reflect the impact of cost reduction actions taken by the directorate to support the Council's forecast overspend.
- 13.2 **Communications, Culture & Engagement** is forecasting an underspend of £0.18m in line with the August forecast. This underspend is arising from a forecast overachievement in venues and film location income. All the income streams are monitored closely to identify trends and pick up any potential fall in activity which reduces income so that mitigating actions can be taken to respond.
- 13.3 **Legal, Democratic & Electoral Services** is forecasting an underspend of £0.24m in line with the forecast as at August. The underspend reflects the directorate's response to the Council's overall overspend which arises from underspends due to the delay in filling posts to improve member casework (the forecast for this service assumes full implementation by 1st October); and holding unspent non staff budgets across the service. In addition, the forecast underspend reflects a number of vacancies across the services. The service is achieving its vacancy factor and will be recruiting to vacant posts over the coming months. This is reflected in the forecast.
- 13.4 **Libraries & Heritage** is currently forecasting a £0.045m overspend, a minimal increase on the August position. The main drivers for the

overspend position are non delivery of income targets, along with additional premises operational costs.

13.5 The directorate is on target to deliver the approved **Savings**.

13.6 A summary of **risks** to the service going forward are:

- There is a small risk of not achieving the £0.108m vacancy savings in the Library Services due to the time it is taking to recruit to all the new posts in the restructured service and the need to retain some old unbudgeted posts during the transition period to keep this frontline service open.
- Not achieving the external income target of £0.563m in legal services is a risk. Income was £67K (13%) below target in 2022/23 and this may continue into 2023/24. The income risk is due to the slowdown in the development activity across the borough. The income generated from capital recharges, property and S106 agreements has reduced in the last couple of years. This forecast shows achievement to budget and a review of activity will be carried out to inform the forecast for the end of financial quarter three. We continue to monitor this risk closely.
- Whilst we are currently forecasting an overachievement of income from our venues and film location service and so the non delivery of income remains a risk. The cost of living crisis and high inflation continues and these income streams are particularly sensitive to the impact of the current economic situation. We will continue to monitor income streams closely as part of our OFP reporting.

13.6 **Management Actions to reduce any overspends.** The Directors and Heads of Service will continually review their budgets to identify opportunities to reduce reserve use and mitigate any potential income shortfalls.

14.0 **HRA**

14.1 The HRA is forecasting to draw down £1m from reserves in order to breakeven for 2023/24. This reflects the decision taken in April to phase the increase to the Council's district heat networks over two years. The forecast outturn position and future performance remain subject to the risk factors described in this report.

14.2 **Income**

A review of HRA income was undertaken based on the Housing Finance system report, which has led to variances across all income categories.

Further refinement of the income forecasts was undertaken during the period.

- **Dwelling rents.** An increase of £277k income is forecast. The rental income forecast for temporary accommodation, reflecting the use of vacant homes across our housing regeneration programme estates, has reduced which reflects the decanting of properties for the next phases of the developments. This has been more than offset by an increase in the forecast for rent which is due to the new permanent and shared tenancies starting in-year reflecting an improvement in void turnaround times.
- **Non-dwelling rent** is forecast to be £789k over budget as a result of increased income from garages and community halls generated by the new online booking system, along with a forecast increase in commercial rent income.
- **Income from Tenant Charges** is forecast to be £959k over budget as a result of increased income collected within the Housing Finance System, which largely relates to Landlord lighting reflecting increased costs of energy.
- **Other Charges for Services and Facilities**, the reduction in forecast income of £717k is mainly due to the management fee collected as part of major works billing. A review of major works bills is currently being undertaken by the homeownership team to establish the level of income expected for 2023/24.

14.3 Expenditure

- **Housing Repairs Account** - overall there is no significant change from the previous month. The forecast for the year is just under a £1m overspend primarily driven by the DLO (£600k), due to increased labour and materials costs; and an additional resources requirement in legal disrepair and building maintenance (£640k) to tackle the demand for legal cases/complaints. This is offset by a £200k underspend within community halls and R&M forecast.
- **Special Services** - the overspend (£2.475m) mainly relates to gas and electricity. Energy prices have significantly increased for 2023/24 which has been reflected in the forecast. Also, there is an overspend on lift repairs due to works required on maintenance and renewal. The lift procurement contract has been delayed resulting in a forecast overspend. There is also a forecast overspend on ground maintenance due to additional agency staff and forecast increased spend on hardware maintenance fees.

The repairs contract centre (RCC) is forecast to overspend by £300k but this could increase during the rest of the year. The volume of phone calls is significantly high and we are yet to enter the winter period which is usually the peak time of the year. The overspend is being driven by the increased demand in the number of reactive

repairs, including damp and mould works along with average length of the phone calls.

- **Supervision and Management** - there is an underspend due to a reduction in allowances to be paid to TMO's as service responsibilities were handed back to the Council after the 2023/24 budget was set. Also there are a number of vacancies within Asset Management - a recruitment drive is currently underway though and staff are expected to be in place for the last quarter of the year. There are also some additional forecast overspends in other areas including £200k on the call centre.
- **Rents, Rates, Taxes and Other Charges** - the variance is mainly due to an increase in the cost forecast for business rates on Community Halls and Housing Management Offices. There has been minimal change since the August forecast.

14.4 **Variances from the Previous Month**

Special Services - the forecasts for utilities on Community Halls have been adjusted positively by £215k to reflect the fact actual bills have now been issued and credits applied to the accounts.

Supervision and Management - the adverse movement in the forecast of £398k from the previous period is predominantly due to increased staffing costs across all service areas.

14.5 **Management Actions to reduce the overspend in 2023/24**

Heads of Service are continually reviewing their overspends and working to identify strategies to mitigate the level of overspend. The Strategic Director will review all service areas to hold non essential spend to mitigate the overspending areas. A review of non-essential spend will be carried out in order to identify further savings.

14.6 **Risks**

Area	Amount £000's
Bills relating to gas and electricity are often based on estimated usage. If the estimates are higher than the usage assumed in the budgets there may be a risk to the HRA. The estimated charges are yet to be verified by the Energy Management Team.	TBC
The 2023/24 pay award is yet to be agreed by trade unions, however the current award would add an additional £2m to the cost of the HRA. There are currently a number of areas of spend under review within the HRA, unless additional efficiencies can be identified the additional cost may need to be funded from Reserves.	2,000
DLO - the forecast overspend could increase up to £1.9m, this may be offset against the capitalisation of revenue works.	0
	2,000

There remain several other risks within the HRA budgets which could have a further financial impact as detailed in the commentary above. These will be continuously monitored and communicated to Senior Management as the year progresses. In addition, these risks will be fed into the HRA 30 Year Business Plan. The Business Plan is being reviewed and updated over the next few months and will then set a strategic level budget for 2024/25 to inform detailed budget setting.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Business Rates Retention and Pooling

Background documents

None.

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