
Revenue Budget 2024/25 Update

Committee considering report:	Joint Public Protection Committee
Date of Committee:	11 th December 2023
Chair of Committee:	Councillor Lee Dillon
Date JMB agreed report:	20 November 2023
Report Author:	Sean Murphy
Forward Plan Ref:	N/a

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the proposals to deliver a balanced budget for 2024/25 with respect to the shared Public Protection Service.

2. Recommendations

The Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTES** the budget position of each partner Council
- 2.2 **NOTES** the proposals set out in this report to deliver a balanced budget including the impacts and associated risks;
- 2.3 **CONSIDERS** any further budget representations to the partner Councils;

3. Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	<p>The financial implications are set out in the body of the report.</p> <p>Any costs arising from further need for service changes will be met within the terms set out in the Inter-Authority Agreement.</p>
Human Resource:	<p>The report sets out proposals to delete a number of vacancies along with the implications of doing so.</p> <p>Should the Bracknell final budget position be as set out in the report then it is likely that further service adjustments will be needed to balance the budget.</p> <p>Any changes will be made in accordance with West Berkshire Council change management and HR policies.</p>

Legal:	<p>The IAA (Inter-Authority Agreement) that set up the Partnership effectively delegates responsibility for the strategic direction of the PPP to the Joint Public Protection Committee. The responsibilities of the Committee are set out in Schedule 1 to the agreement.</p> <p>Included is the responsibility to propose a fee structure and annual budget to the partner Councils and agree any variations to the budget.</p> <p>The budget was considered by the Committee at its meeting on the 02nd October 2023. The proposed contribution by each Council was as set out at 5.6 below.</p> <p>The implications arising from that report and discussions with the partner authorities in the intervening period are set out in this report.</p> <p>The Committee is now asked to note those implications and advise whether any further representations be made to the partner authorities.</p>			
Risk Management:	<p>The implications for the proposed reduction in posts and the nature of the posts to be deleted are set out in this report.</p> <p>The risks associated with service disinvestment in Bracknell is a matter for Bracknell Forest Council alone.</p>			
Property:	<p>There are no direct property implications arising from this report.</p>			
Policy:	<p>The Committee has responsibility for setting the strategic direction and policy of the PPP. This includes the maintenance of financial oversight to ensure sound financial management. More specifically the Committee has responsibility for recommending to the Councils a budget that meets its needs with respect to service delivery.</p> <p>Updates on the financial position are presented to the Committee as part of the quarterly performance monitoring regime.</p>			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision,		x		Where any decisions are made to change service provision individual impact assessments will be undertaken. There are

including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?				currently no proposals to disinvest from any services already provided.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		None
Environmental Impact:	X			The service plays a significant role in the protection of the environment including air quality, land contamination, planning considerations and enforcement of green energy claims. The proposals in this report if accepted will maintain capacity in this area.
Health Impact:	X			A significant number of the Partnership's Service Priorities relate to protecting and improving health. These included food safety and standards, health and safety, tackling fraud, air quality and private sector housing. If this activity continues to be funded there will be a continuing positive impact on the health of residents and visitors to Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire.
ICT or Digital Services Impact:		x		None Albeit that the Service will continue to promote initiatives on its social media platforms and website.
PPP Priorities :		x		PPP Priorities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alcohol and Tobacco Harm Reduction 2. Animal Welfare 3. Cost of Living 4. Environmental Protection 5. Food Safety and Standards 6. Health and Safety Enforcement 7. Housing Standards in the Private Rental Sector 8. Impact of Nuisance on Residents and Communities 9. Improved Air Quality 10. Licensing 11. Nutrition and Childhood Obesity 12. Service Improvement 13. Tackling Fraud

			14. Unsafe Consumer Goods The work of the PPP will support the Council priorities in both the partner authorities.
Data Impact:		X	This decision about budget setting will not have a significant impact on the rights of data subjects
Consultation and Engagement:	The fees for Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles and Private Hire operators proposed at the last meeting are currently subject to statutory consultation. The remainder of the fees and charges will be subjected to any budgetary consultation exercises undertaken by the partner authorities.		
Other Options Considered:	The Councils are currently still considering their wider revenue budgets for 2024/25. Should either of the Councils seek to disinvest in this area of service there is a methodology agreed (by JPPC) for doing so.		

4. Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) between the Councils sets out the functions that are delegated to the Joint Public Protection Committee (JPPC) under the terms of the agreement. To deliver these functions for the Councils they are requested on an annual basis to allocate a budget to the service and with the oversight of JPPC.
- 4.2 At its meeting on the 02nd October 2023 the Committee considered its budget requirements in the context of two significant pressures. The first being a salary pressure arising from the decision of Wokingham to leave the Partnership at the end of March 2022. The second related to a systemic pressure on income arising primarily from loss of licensing income. The salary pressure for 2024/25 is £291K and income pressure stands at £98K (although this may reduce dependent on the fees consultation). The total pressure therefore being £387K.
- 4.3 The service management was required by the Committee to look at options for achieving a balanced budget for 2024/25. Discussions have now taken place with partner Councils as part of the budget setting process and this report sets out the proposals to balance the budget along with associated risks. It is important to note that for the first time since its inception the proposals in this report will mean that there will be differing levels of service in each partner Council area.
- 4.4 In preparing this report it is important to stress that all budget decisions are provisional at this stage and will not be finalised until the spring when final allocations are determined and fees and charges are set. Also, at the time of writing the income situation is showing some signs of improvement.

5. Supporting Information

Shared Salary Pressure

- 5.1 At the meeting on the 2nd October 2023 the Committee were updated that the salary pressure arising from the decision of Wokingham to leave the partnership in March 2022 had risen to £291K in 2024/25. This was initially £249K in 2022/23 and has been managed by a combination of one-off support from partner Councils as well as grant funding for Homes for Ukraine work and Wokingham compensation. It was always understood that it was likely in 2024/25 that this pressure would need to be met from savings within the service. To this end a series of actions were taken which included service re-configuration by replacing some posts with trainee posts and by holding vacancies as they arose.
- 5.2 The expenditure has now been identified that will close the funding gap with respect to the £291K. To do so it is proposed to delete the following 6.6FTE of vacancies to deliver the commensurate savings:

Post	Role	Saving / FTE	Risk
Fair Trading Officer	Reduction in trading standards input into SR and inspection work	£13.91K 0.4FTE	Medium. There is rising demand within trading standards. This will reduce ability to deliver food standards programme
Trainee Victim Support Officer	Victim Support	£13.76K 0.5FTE	Negligible as we currently have four trainees
Senior / Environmental Health Officers	Food Safety, Housing, Environmental Protection	£82.89K 1.7FTE	Medium The main impacts in this reduction will fall in the areas of food safety and private sector housing. We currently are unable to deliver the full food safety programme and housing demand is rising.
Criminal Investigator	Conducting criminal investigations – usually Trading Standards	£45.5K 1.0 FTE	Medium. No doubt that levels of reports of unfair trading and fraud are rising. This will lead to some not getting investigated that otherwise may have done.
Support Posts	1 FTE in customer service and 0.5 FTE in licensing applications	£47.62K 1.5 FTE	Medium: Loss of resilience. More administrative work undertaken by qualified

			professional and technical officers
Lead Officer – Community Engagement	Communications and Community Engagement	£52.3K 1.0FTE	Medium: This will significantly reduce our ability to deliver the ‘prevent’ part of the delivery model, reduce numbers of press releases, articles, website updates and social media. Risk of receiving less intelligence leading to being unable to assist residents and respond to crime.
Animal Warden	Collection of stray dogs, engagement with dog owners, dangerous dogs and enforcement	£21.7K 0.5FTE	The primary impact will be on engagement and enforcement re chipping, dog fouling etc. This will leave us with one animal warden who is going on maternity leave shortly. Collections will be contracted out with a cost impact.

5.3 The proposals above if accepted by the Committee will deliver £271K of the £291K required savings. It is proposed the remaining £20K is delivered from managing vacancies in year.

5.4 There are a small number of other vacancies in the service that we are trying to fill as they are business critical or which are needed to manage other financial risks.

Income Shortfall

5.5 At the meeting on the 02nd October 2023 it was reported to Committee that there was an income shortfall at that time of £98K. The split of this shortfall was Bracknell Forest - £40K and West Berkshire - £58K.

5.6 Since that meeting, discussions have taken place on the shortfall and a provisional decision has been taken by West Berkshire to treat its share as a pressure and build into the base budget from 2024/25.

Base Budget

5.7 At the meeting the following base budget was proposed:

Authority	% split	Base Budget 2024/25	Wokingham Salary Pressure	Investment Bid Income Pressure	Total Budget 2024/25
Bracknell Forest	39.25%	£ 1,233,603	£ 114,217	£ 40,000	£ 1,387,820
West Berkshire	60.75%	£ 1,909,327	£ 176,783	£ 58,000	£ 2,144,110
Wokingham	-	£ 515,990	-	-	£ 515,990
Total Budget 2024/25	100.00%	£ 3,658,920	£ 291,000	£ 98,000	£ 4,047,920

- 5.8 West Berkshire have confirmed that £1,909,327 has been allocated to the service for 2024/25 and that the income pressure of £58K has been met.
- 5.9 Bracknell have now considered the request for £1,233,603 as set out above and have notified that this has created a pressure of £90K. Additionally, the provisional decision by West Berkshire to fund its share of the income shortfall i.e. £58K would mean that to maintain parity of budgets a pressure bid of £40k would need to be funded.
- 5.10 At the time of writing Bracknell are still considering options around these pressures and we will update JPPC on any implications for service delivery as the budget process progresses.

6. Concluding Observations

- 6.1 This is a challenging time for local authority funding. It was inevitable the decision of Wokingham to leave the partnership in March 2022 would lead to reductions in front line operational resource if we were to maintain the levels of expertise at operational management levels. The expertise within the service is at the core of our ability to deliver the range of functions that this Committee are familiar with and of which examples are set out elsewhere on this agenda.
- 6.2 Service Management has worked closely with Joint Management Board and with each Council to reduce the impact of the proposals set out in this report. Nevertheless, there will inevitably be an impact. Over time as our investment in apprenticeships and training and development comes to fruition, we will lessen that impact.
- 6.3 Officers will produce further updates for the Committee should there be any change in the proposed budget position and should any further impacts develop.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 None

8. Background Papers:

- 8.1 JPPC Budget Report – 02 October 2023

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: X No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

X

Wards affected: All Wards

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