

Feedback on Performance and In-Year Budget Monitoring

Adult Care and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Performance

The main area of discussion was around the target to reduce admissions to permanent care, for which Worcestershire is significantly above the national average. The Directorate has kept the Panel updated across recent meetings about its work to understand this, and this work continues, however many factors are beyond the Council's control, for example people staying in hospital longer and with more complex discharge.

Finance

The Directorate's current forecast is for a £2.4m overspend, which is significant but is reduced from earlier predictions. The most significant areas of overspend are:

- £2.2m in Older people Residential and Nursing services budget – not due to increasing numbers of people but greater needs and rising prices, for example, wages and agency costs due to difficulties in recruiting nurses.
- £0.8m overspend in Learning Disability services, a factor is people are living longer now

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Performance

Members asked questions about specific performance indicators and budget information including:

Education

- How support is provided by Babcock Prime in relation to school improvement, including:
 - a. why the County's Ofsted performance measured by the percentage of 'good' or 'outstanding' schools remained below the national average?
 - b. what was the rate of improvement of schools judged to be requiring improvement or inadequate?
- How the number of young people Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) is monitored?
- Ongoing work to improve the percentage of school-aged Looked After Children with an up-to-date Personal Education Plan (81% in September 2019).

SEND

- Concern about the number of Electively Home Educated children who had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) (39 in September 2019) and, in

particular, whether parents were able to provide a suitable education for children with an EHCP.

Social Care

- The Panel requested further details of Worcestershire children who were placed out-of-county in unregistered children's homes and were assured that this information would be available following the meeting.
- Members were interested in the number of apprenticeship or work experience opportunities that the Council and partners offered to Looked After Children.
- A question was asked about levels of child poverty in the County and the Panel agreed to add this issue to its Work Programme.
- Members were reassured that the use of agency staff continued to be low.

Finance

With relation to 2019/20 Budget Period 6:

- Overall, the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) showed an overspend position of £8.9m due to pressures in the High Needs Budget, particularly in out of county and post-16 provision. Worcestershire's pressures are in line with the national picture.
- The non-DSG budget forecast a £0.925m overspend, mainly due to a £1m overspend in the Home to School and College Transport budget.

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Performance

Due to timings, the performance data was to be presented to the Panel's meeting in December instead.

Finance

In-Year Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2

The Director of Commercial and Commissioning (COaCH) advised that it was anticipated that there would be an underspend for COaCH of £556k at year end, which was a £417k improvement since Quarter 1. This positive performance was largely as a result of a clear focus on contract spend and management of vacancies, along with some elements of additional income being obtained. In terms of the Communities budget, the Panel was informed that it was well managed and forecasted to meet budget, as predicted, with no significant issues.

Commercial and Commissioning

- The overall forecast is an underspend of £556k (8.1%)
- Improvement of £278k since P5 and £417k improvement since Q1 due to mainly to:
 - In year savings relating to the Talent Programme - £97k
 - Additional Registration fees - £60k
 - Reduced CIMU costs - £30k

- Reduction in property services contract costs - £250k

Communities

- The overall forecast is an underspend of 0.28% (No significant variances.)

Members Comments

- Concern was expressed in respect of the reduction in funding for the Talent Programme, which was an area that some Members felt was of great value in providing skills training for young people.
- Further details about the £250k reduction in Property Services contract costs were requested. The Director advised that the contracts relating to every Directorate had been closely looked at, to establish whether there was scope for savings, for instance, by way of combining services and contracts at the procurement stage.
- In terms of the Communities budget, a Member asked for an explanation on the 7.8% variance on the Countryside Greenspace and Gypsies. The Head of Finance advised that this was a one-off issue relating to water services, which had arisen during the Quarter 2, and which was currently being investigated. The Panel would be provided with a report back when clarification was obtained.

Overall Comment

Positive response from members on good performance and budget control.