

Agenda Item 3

Questions for CEB, 10th September, relating to Agenda Item 9, Integrated Performance Report

1. Appendix B, City Regeneration Directorate, note 1, states a variance of £191 million, repeated in Appendix E, page 2, note 5 – can you please confirm if this variance as stated is correct, or should it be £191,000?

The figure should be £191,000

2. Appendix E, page 3, note 9, states that “Engineering are successfully winning works”, with an anticipated additional contribution to the budget iro £250,000. Can you please provide a list of these works, the customers for whom these works are being or will be carried out, along with their individual values?

This is commercially sensitive information but works are being carried out for a number of third parties including the County Council, universities and the Councils Housing Revenue Account

3. Appendix E, page 3, note 12, Corporate Activities, describes a £257,000 forecast adverse variance, related to subsidy loss. Can you please explain the cause of the “Local Authority error overpayments” – who is responsible for these overpayment errors, and what actions are being taken to (a) mitigate the effect of these errors on the budget and (b) prevent such errors recurring in future?

The local authority is able to claim subsidy on Housing Benefit overpayments but subsidy on overpayments related to local authority error and admin delays may be reduced to zero if the amount of overpayment in this category exceeds a certain threshold. For 2014/15 as at 30th June based on the current trajectory of local authority error and admin delays it is estimated that 60% of the subsidy on these overpayments will be lost.

Admin delays can arise from backlogs of processing incoming post and errors occur from incorrect processing of benefit claims. Officers are looking to mitigate these issues by additional training for staff processing claims and additional checking of the claims themselves. In addition ‘pre-assessment’ is being undertaken to suspend cases where an overpayment looks likely to arise from information provided.

4. Appendix E, page 4, Table 2, Line 8, shows Savings and Efficiencies for Leisure, Parks & Communities – can you please provide a breakdown of the Approved Savings in each of the three categories shown in the table (Efficiencies, Service Reductions and Fees and Charges), and also what comprises the Savings made to date in each case?

Efficiencies

Leisure, Parks & Communities	Reduction in fee paid to Fusion in line with contract. Increase in 2014-15 fees due to lifecycle costs associated with equipment replacement.	36
Leisure, Parks & Communities	£10k per year from supplies and services for Communities & Neighbourhoods Team. Re-provision of Northway sports facility will reduce costs & Restructuring following redevelopment of Northway Community Centre	(10)
Leisure, Parks & Communities	£10k per year from premises running costs, which are the council's contribution to the running costs of Community Centres and two sports facilities Re-provision of Northway sports facility will reduce costs	(10)
Leisure, Parks & Communities	Efficiency gains from youth ambition programmes	(5)
Leisure, Parks & Communities	Leisure Contract	(77)

Service Reductions

Leisure, Parks & Communities	14SR2201	Increased community management of facilities e.g. bowls greens and pavilions.	(30)
Leisure, Parks & Communities	15SR2201	Realignment of community development budgets	(110)

Fees and Charges

Leisure, Parks & Communities	15FC2202	Improved Partnership working with Green spaces organisations	(10)
Leisure, Parks & Communities	14FC2203	Commissioned tree team to do other work to help to subsidise their costs.	(15)
Leisure, Parks & Communities	14FC2204	Grounds Maintenance team to undertake works for other organisations to help to subsidise their operating costs.	(10)
Leisure, Parks & Communities	14FC2205	Commission Landscaping team to undertake works for other organisations to help to subsidise their operating costs.	(10)
Leisure, Parks & Communities	12SV2224	Deliver tennis coaching / tennis contracts for coaches to hire our courts	(5)
Leisure, Parks & Communities	12SV2201	Commission Sports Development to deliver activities to schools and other districts etc	(4)
Leisure, Parks & Communities	12SV2230	Income for Parks through large Park events	(6)

5. The total Projected outturn in each case shows no variance - can you provide the variance of each item contributing to the total if it varies from the Approved Savings?

All but £17,000 of savings and efficiencies are currently forecast to be achieved. This is due to increases in salaries which is explained in para 15 of Appendix E

6. Appendix E, page 6, Table 4, Capital Programme – S22, Leisure & Communities – can you please explain the £383,832 variance against profiled budget, and also the items comprising the Slippage contributing to the £44,375 Outturn Variance?

The slippage of £44,375 relates to the Donnington Recreation Ground Improvements which has yet to be specified. The £383,832 largely relates to the Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre (£304,840) which is an adjustment to the budget following updated information from the contractor.

7. Appendix E2, Capital Budget and Spend Table – F7023, Templars Square Public Safety Measures – can you please explain what the budget of £10,000 was to cover, why there is an overspend of £4,512, and why the % Spend Against Latest Budget is shown as zero?

The budget is to fund additional lighting at Templars Square retail park and is funded by Section 106 resources. The cost exceeded the estimate but this has been funded by additional Section 106 receipts

8. Appendix E2, Capital Budget and Spend Table – A4808, Blackbird Leys LC Improvements - can you please provide a list of the items comprising this figure, and explain when the spend in this area is anticipated?

This is to fund outdoor works i.e astro turf next to the pavilion at Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre

9. Appendix E2, Capital Budget and Spend Table – A4814, Leisure Centre substantive repairs - can you please provide a list of the items comprising this figure, and explain the spend in this area to date?

Residual budget for substantive repairs and refurbishment of Council leisure centres.

10. Appendix E2, Capital Budget and Spend Table – B0080, Templars Square Refurbishment/Relocation – what items comprise these figures, and why is there a forecast underspend against the original budget?

The original scheme was to undertake extensive refurbishment of the building or prudentially relocate. With the uncertainties around Universal Credit the aspirations have been scaled back to undertake minimal refurbishment. The £126k underspend has been subsequently vired to spend on other projects within the capital programme

11. Appendix E2, Capital Budget and Spend Table – A4815, Leisure Centre Improvement Work – can you please provide a list of the items comprising this figure, and explain when the spend in this area is anticipated?

This relates to works to be undertaken at Ferry Leisure Centre on soft play and spin studio area. Alternative options for implementation currently being evaluated.

12. Appendix E2, Capital Budget and Spend Table – A4829, Oxford Spires Academy – can you please provide a list of the items comprising this figure, and explain when the spend in this area is anticipated?

This is the Council's contribution towards new gym facilities at Oxford Spires Academy on the basis of them being open to the public. Planned opening date for Gym is January 2016 with construction commencing in 2015.

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Questions to City Executive Board, 10th September 2014

Item 7: Commissioning Advice Services, 2015-2018

The advice agencies are grateful for the City Council's continuing support as demonstrated in this report, particularly the proposal to offer 3-year funding and to consult with us further on priorities and outcomes. We recognise that the City Council must ensure that grant money is properly spent. However, we have some questions as follows:

1. Are all Councillors aware that the agencies specialise to some extent in different aspects of client need and that it is therefore necessary to ensure that proposed outcomes are flexible enough to take account of different roles and levels of capacity?

The Executive Board cannot speak for all councillors. The Service specification in the Executive Board report reflects the fact that the advice organisations provide different services; stating that outcomes are only expected where such services are provided. Over the last year the Council has worked closely with the advice organisations to ensure we have a good understanding of the services provided. The report recognises the benefit of this closer working and the desirability of continuing to work together to develop the appropriate priority outcomes and measures.

2. If a changing annual priority area is agreed, how will this be flexible enough to deal with a situation where priorities may change mid-year? (For example, if a new Government in May 2015 were to adopt a different approach.)

The aim of the priority area is to help deliver the objectives of the Council's Financial Inclusion Strategy. And it is not expected that these objectives will change significantly during any given year. Consequently, priority areas will be agreed on an annual basis. Where new issues arise during the year, the Council will work with the advice sector to tackle them, but funding will not be redirected in year unless by mutual agreement.

3. Are all Councillors aware that the City Council grant provides only part of the funding for each of the advice agencies and that re-orientating the focus of their work each year would be difficult to achieve whilst also meeting continuing obligations to other funders?

Oxford City Council has recently published a financial inclusion strategy which aims to make material improvements to financial inclusion in the city. It also has a fiduciary duty to ensure value for money. Clearly the Council has always sought to ensure that its objectives are met through its commissioning and grant giving processes. The commissioning framework has been developed through extensive consultation with the advice organisations to ensure flexibility is balanced with delivery of the objectives required by the Council.

As public sector funding continues to be squeezed, it is increasingly important that vital services are delivered by partners in a joined up way. The Council is using this commissioning process to ensure that services delivered by the advice sector are aligned with the shared outcomes within the Financial Inclusion Strategy. City and County grants are vital to pay for the core funding needed by advice agencies to pay for staff and offices. Do all Councillors realise that the withdrawal of a proportion of grant in the second or subsequent years of 3-year funding could jeopardise the continued existence of some of the agencies?

The Council's Standard Funding Agreement has always contained a provision for funding to be withdrawn from an organisation that is not delivering the services that have been commissioned. It is not the Council's intention to use this provision to reduce the amount of funding spent in the delivery of advice, simply to ensure that its priority objectives are met. The priority objectives which are agreed are the issues which are the most pressing to our shared customers. Unlike other grant providers locally, the City Council has increased the amount of funding to the advice sector in recent years and remains very committed to this area of work.

4. The advice agencies in Oxford work together very co-operatively. Is there not a concern that, if funding were withdrawn from one agency and given to another instead, this might endanger future co-operation?

The Council is committed to working in partnership with the advice sector and supporting organisations that have difficulty in meeting the priority outcomes that are agreed. As such it is hoped that there will be no need to redistribute funding. However, the Council also has a responsibility to secure Value for money and ensure the outcomes it has commissioned are delivered.

Sue Tanner (Rose Hill & Donnington Advice Centre) and Fran Bennett (Agnes Smith Advice Centre)
8th September 2014