

Cabinet 27 July 2015

Report from the Chief Finance Officer

Wards affected: ALL

Financial Report - May 2015

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report highlights the overall financial position of the Council as at May 2015. The report will cover the following topics:
 - Revenue Budget monitoring summary
 - 2015/16 Savings
 - Council Tax & NNDR Collection Rates
 - Other debt analysis and collection
 - Capital Programme monitoring summary

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That Cabinet notes the financial position of the Council as at the end of May 2015

3.0 Revenue Budget Monitoring Summary

- 3.1 As at May 2015 the overall forecast is that the general fund budget will be overspent by £2.6m by the year end. The issues are principally in the Children and Young People's and Regeneration and Growth departments. Paragraphs 3.6 to 3.14 and 3.19 to 3.21 set out the issues and the action being taken to resolve them in more detail. In summary the key management actions in place in CYP to lower costs are to:
 - review, by August 2015, all short term placements costing over £500 per week;
 - conclude a review of support costs for children who are no longer looked after;
 and
 - establish monthly meetings with health colleagues to ensure that proper contributions towards the health component of care packages are made.

- 3.2 Within Regeneration and Growth the principal pressures are in temporary accommodation, where the decline in numbers forecast over the year, whilst welcome, does not match the budget targets planned for. The separate report on this agenda on Housing Supply and Demand sets out in greater detail the measures to reduce the use of expensive emergency accommodation and increase the supply of new accommodation.
- 3.3 If these actions do not reduce the overspends forecast against these budgets then further controls over expenditure will be introduced to produce underspends against other areas of the budget in order to contain expenditure within the available resources.
- 3.4 However, this does need to be seen in the context. The council's net budget is £250m, and is therefore forecast to be overspent by 1%. The council set a challenging budget for 2015/16 with savings of £27.5m to be delivered in year. Seen in this context the projected overspend, even if not corrected by the year-end, would still represent delivery of over 90% of the planned savings. This is not to underplay the vital importance of delivering against the agreed budget, but the context is nevertheless important to understanding the financial position.
- 3.5 The table below sets out the forecasts against the revenue budget by department.

Department	Gross Expenditure Budget	Gross Income Budget	Net Budget	Forecast Outturn	Forecast Variance
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Children & Young People	48.8	(9.4)	39.4	40.7	1.3
Adult Services	104.4	(20.3)	84.1	84.1	0
Regeneration & Growth	94.2	(69.5)	24.7	25.8	1.1
Chief Operating Officer	110	(50.5)	59.5	59.7	0.2
Public Health	18	0	18	18	0
Service Area Total	375.4	(149.7)	225.7	228.3	2.6

3.6 Children & Young People

The Children & Young People's department has forecast that it will overspend its social care budget by £1.3m. A significant cost driver is the number of children being looked after, or otherwise monitored by the department, and if numbers rise then there are further risks to the budget.. All of the significant financial issues are within Children's Social Care; the Early Help and Education division is forecast to spend to budget.

3.7 Within Children's Social Care, the forecast overspend against the budget and financial risks have three principal components.

No Recourse to Public funds.

3.8 The service is currently supporting 61 families at a projected cost of £0.9m in 2015/16, which would result in an overspend of £0.4m against the current budget of £0.5m. In order to contain this pressure the service has tightened eligibility criteria in line with other London boroughs and is challenging all accommodation types to ensure the cost and size of accommodation is proportionate to the size of the family. In addition, the service has begun offering families cheaper accommodation outside of London. In order to progress

with this strategy further, a joint project has been formed with Housing to set up a housing scheme for NRPF clients. The model will save money by moving NRPF clients into cheaper accommodation instead of housing them in expensive B&Bs in Brent.

3.9 This is a highly volatile budget and it is difficult to asses the number of families that will present themselves during the year and the number that will leave Brent. Therefore the following assumptions have been taken into account to calculate the forecast; an analysis of previous year's trends in terms of the mix of families leaving and entering the service, an estimate of the number of families currently in B&B that the service will be able to move into cheaper accommodation during the year, and the average number of families being maintained at the current level of 61 at any one point in time.

Children's Social Care Savings 2015/16.

- 3.10 As part of the Council's agreed budget in March 2015, Children's Social Care are required to save £2.2m in 2015/16 and a further £0.9m in 2016/17, a total of £3.1m. These savings were principally to be achieved through more efficient commissioning of services, for example in collaboration with other WLA boroughs, increasing use of direct payments and through continuing to manage the number of secure remand placements at or about the levels experienced in the last eighteen months. In order to deliver these savings a number of projects have either begun or are being developed with the expectation of meeting the required savings targets. At present, two key savings targets have been identified as being at high risk of not being fully delivered.
 - A saving of £0.3m in 2015/16 was planned to be achieved within the social care placements budget, predicated on a change in the mix of placements, specifically reducing the number of residential care, independent fostering and remand placements and increasing the use of in house Brent foster carers. Further savings of £0.14m were also predicated on reducing the overall numbers of looked after children through more effective early intervention. To date these combined savings are forecast to be under achieved by £0.3m.
 - In addition, there is a potential cost pressure of £0.4m related to staffing. This
 includes the additional costs of employing agency staff due recruitment and
 retention issues. Also, the savings in relation to the de-layering of management
 are partly predicated on a new structure being implemented for Children's Social
 Care as part of the Signs of Safety project. At present this project is behind
 schedule and is forecast to go live from December 2015.

Overall, at present the various projects are forecast to deliver savings of £1.3m in 2015/16 and £1.3m in 2016/17, against the total target for the two years of £3.1m.

- 3.11 Workforce planning in Children's Social Care is designed to ensure that caseloads across the Locality service do not exceed 20 children per social worker and in Care Planning do not exceed 15 children per social worker. This strategy is in light of the ongoing growth in Brent's child population, increased expectations from Ofsted and recruitment/retention issues in relation to Social Workers.
- 3.12 However, the initial one-off intervention in 2014/15 to achieve this will not be sustained unless either more permanent resources are allocated to the service (increasing the savings required by the council as a whole) or unless the total number of cases under management begins to reduce. The effect of social work interventions should ideally be to deal with the particular circumstances in a child's life and put in place structures where ongoing (or significant ongoing) support by the Council is no longer required.

- 3.13 Although in many cases this will not be practicable successful interventions should have the twin impact of improving children's lives and reducing ongoing costs. However, ongoing demographic pressures go the other way, and increase the total number of cases with which the service has to engage.
- 3.14 Further work will need to be done by the service to establish how caseloads will continue to be balanced and how total cases are managed within available resources. There is therefore a risk that further overspends in this area will become apparent, and a short-term strategy of one-off funding for this, whilst potentially reasonable for 2015/16, will not be financially sustainable in the long-term unless further savings are found.

Adult Services

- 3.15 The Adults budget is forecasting spend to budget as at May. The major possible pressures that have been identified to date, relate to delivery of some of the savings items in 2015/16. At present, these are forecast to be met, although it has been recognised that some of these carry a higher risk of not being fully delivered.
- 3.16 The first risk relates to Reablement, where a 10% saving upon homecare was agreed, therefore leaving a total potential cost pressure of £0.6m if unachieved. The second is Commissioning with a potential budget pressure of £0.5m. This is attached to a new Commissioning model being implemented across Adults, Children's and Public Health.
- 3.17 The third is within Mental Health, which has a savings requirement to reduce client numbers to 10, by the end of 2015/16. The current number of residential clients is 28. It is expected that some of the additional costs that this pressure will generate, can be contained within the existing budget. It is also anticipated that suitable supported and independent accommodation will be identified in 2015/16, aimed at reducing the number of residential clients towards the target figure. This leaves a potential cost pressure of £0.1m.

Regeneration & Growth

- 3.18 The department is reporting a projected overspend of £1.1m. The significant contributing factors leading to the adverse position are the temporary accommodation and Brent START budgets.
- 3.19 The temporary accommodation (TA) budget is reporting a projected overspend for the year of £0.65m. To date the number of households supported in TA has reduced from 3,161 at the end of March 2015 to 3,085, at the end of May, a fall of 76. Service managers are predicting that 2,962 families will be remaining in TA by the end of March 2016, a reduction of a further 123 households. This is heavily dependent on the level of increase incidence of families presenting and being accepted as requiring Temporary Accommodation and the impact of increased numbers in bed and breakfast due to a shortfall in available rented properties.
- 3.20 The report elsewhere on the Cabinet Agenda in relation to Housing Supply and Demand sets out the ongoing pressures in respect of temporary accommodation, together with a range of measures that are being put in place to try and bear down on the use and costs of that accommodation. This includes measures to reduce expensive emergency accommodation (bed and breakfasts), and measures to increase the supply of new accommodation (including hostel provision and modular homes). The budget is closely

- monitored by senior housing and finance staff on a monthly basis to identify cost risks and bring forward proposals for the management of these risks.
- 3.21 At present the overspend is being forecast because, although the number of households in TA is expected to fall by almost 200, or 6%, this is not as great a fall as was assumed could be achieved when the budget was set.
- 3.22 The Brent Start budget is forecast to be overspent by £0.35m. Performance against the SFA contract during the 2014/15 academic year has not been as strong as anticipated, leading to a potential claw back against the grant previously allocated. There have been a number of contributory factors to this, including a reduction in classroom capacity associated with the need to vacate Madison House at short notice. Mitigation measures being undertaken include a cleansing of all management information to ensure the final claim is fully accurate (and therefore maximising the grant draw down) and the provision of additional courses that will deliver further qualification outcomes. The Skills Funding Agency are fully aware and the Operational Director is in regular dialogue with our SFA relationship manager about the situation. Any final clawback at the end of the academic year will be partly offset by savings due to a high vacancy rate within the service during 2014/15.

Chief Operating Officer

- 3.22 The Chief Operating Officer's department is projecting to overspend by £0.2m.
- 3.23 The risk area is within Legal Services, which is projecting a £0.2m overspend. The key cost drivers leading to the adverse position are similar to those faced last year:
 - An upsurge on legal fees resulting from increase in volume of cases re: childcare proceedings; family justice review; property & licensing issues etc.
 - Additional costs resulting from the relocation of the children's court to Feltham. This is
 expected to increase the use of private lawyers instead of own staff, to attend hearing
 on behalf of Brent Council.
- 3.24 With the exception of the above, the remaining services within COO's department are expected to come within budget.

Central items

3.25 The Council holds a number of budgets centrally, rather than within departmental budgets. These mostly relate either to fixed items, such as subscriptions to London Councils or the LGA, or to technical items such as the earnings on treasury items, which cannot be ascribed to the activities of any given departmental budget. In addition, the SEN Transport budgets are now held here, although managerial accountability for allocating places and controlling costs still sits in the children's social care and transport services, as last year. This transfer prevents the recharging of costs between services that was a partial cause of the overspend against last year's budget. Underlying pressures on the SEN budget remain, and are being managed through the One Council project and through addressing the supply side issues.

Ring Fenced Budgets

Housing Revenue Account:

3.26 As shown below, this month Housing Revenue Account is reporting an over spend of £1.1m. The main contributing factor to the over spend is the continued pressure on the

rental income budget due to the increased numbers of RTB sales. At the end of May total RTB sales completed were 39, implying a total for the year of 230-240, as against a total of 114 for RTB and all other reductions in 2014/15.

The Council had planned on the basis of the HRA using £0.8m of its reserves of £4.5m in the 2015/16 budget. As currently forecast this balance would reduce to £2.6m by the year end.

The wider impacts of the anticipated changes to RTB legislation are not yet known. Depending on how the legislation is eventually drafted the impacts to the HRA will vary, but the scenario planning undertaken to date indicates that the impact could be substantial. The recent announcements of reductions to future social housing rents will also impact on the long-term HRA business plan, but the impact of this has not yet been quantified.

Description	Budget 2015-16 £m	Forecast 2015-16 £m	Variance £m
Income	(55.8)	(55.1)	0.7
Expenditure	56.6	57.0	0.4
Deficit/(Surplus) for the year	0.8	1.9	1.1

Dedicated School Grant:

In March 2015 the Department for Education updated the latest DSG settlement for all local authorities. The provisional amount for Brent has been set at £207.208m. The final announcement will be made later in the year and will be subject to further change as academy conversions materialise during the year, funding for disadvantaged two year olds and funding for free entitlement for three and four year olds is released. It is anticipated that the final allocation will be in the region of £215m. Within this budget, £158m is passed directly to Brent schools. This budget does not include the retained balances held within individual School's accounts, which at the end of 2014/15 stood at £20m. Based on a sample of 25 London boroughs this is the fourth highest figure in London, and only about one third of boroughs' schools had, like Brent, increased their balances over this period.

Ring-Fenced budgets	Gross Expenditure Budget	Gross Income Budget	Net Budget	Forecast Outturn	Forecast Variance
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Dedicated Schools Grant	215	0	215	215	0

4.0 Savings

4.1 The table below summarises the 2015/16 savings by department and forecast as at May 2015. Out of the total committed savings of £27.5m, £26.7m (96.4%) are forecast to be delivered.

Service Area	2015/16 Savings	Percentage of 2015/16 budget	Forecast Savings	Forecast Variance
	£m	%	£m	£m
Children & Young People	2.9	7.0	2.1	(8.0)
Adult Services	8.8	9.4	8.8	0.0
Regeneration & Growth	4.1	14.9	4.1	0.0
Chief Operating Officer	11.7	13.3	11.7	0.0
Total	27.5	-	26.7	(8.0)

5.0 Debt & Income Collection Analysis

- 5.1 The Council collects income from individuals and businesses for a range of reasons. The main types of income are:
 - Oracle debt
 - Charges for Social Care Services
 - Council Tax
 - Business Rates (National Non-Domestic Rates)
 - Parking Fines
 - Housing Rents

We also collect a wide range of fees and charges for everything from Land Registry Searches to Planning Applications and Licenses.

5.2 Oracle debt includes invoices raised by service areas and collected by the Finance Service Centre. The table overleaf shows the balance as at 31st May 2015.

	Apr-14	Jul-14	Oct-14	Jan-15	Apr-15	May-15
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Invoices Raised	2.1	0.9	4.5	1.9	1.9	1.9
Collected	(2.0)	(1.3)	(1.0)	(1.3)	(9.1)	(2.5)
Balance	7.4	7.3	9.9	9.7	10.4	9.8

Of the outstanding debt of £9.8 million, 46% relates to invoices up to 60 days past their due date. (18% relates to invoices less than 30 days), 31% relates to debt over 360 days and is being pursued by the FSC debt recovery team, although £0.9m is secured against an asset.

5.3 The Abacus system records debt relating to social care fees and charges for council run services including residential care, day care, home care, adaptations, equipment etc.

	Apr-14	Jul-14	Oct-14	Jan-15	Apr-15	May-15
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Invoices Raised	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7	*0
Collected	0.7	0.7	1.4	0.6	0.6	0.5
Balance	10.4	10.3	9.3	9	9.5	9
Balance disaggregated to:						
Unsecured client debt	7.9	7.9	8.1	7	7.7	7.2
Secured (against Property) client debt	2.5	2.4	1.2	2	1.8	1.8

^{*}No invoices raised in May 2015 while annual reassessments are carried out.

Total debt outstanding at the end of each month has reduced from an average between £10m and £10.5m in the early part of 2014/15 to approximately £9m to £9.5m in 2015/16 (the exact figures vary each month, of course). However, whilst this trend is favourable the proportion of debt secured against client properties is also slightly down to around 20%. This gives the Council comfort that its lawful charges (set within a national framework and guidelines) will in time be paid.

In terms of Council Tax, the total amount required to be collected for 2015/16 is £87.7m (excluding the GLA share) and the collection rate target is 95.9%.

Council Tax collection for 2015/16 was at 21.9% at the end of May 2015, compared to 22.0% for May 2014. The final collection percentage is anticipated to be very similar to last year's figure of 95.6%. However, the target negotiated with Capita for 2015/16 is 95.9%, and so this is at some risk of not being met. This has been escalated with the contractor to seek to get performance back on track.

In 2013/14 Brent's collected 95.7% of the council tax due for that year within twelve months of the billing date, slightly below the London average of 96.2%. This was the 21st highest collection of the London boroughs (the same as in 2012/13). In 2014/15 collection fell to 95.6%. This was against a trend of rising collection rates in London, with

the average rising by 0.3%, and as a result Brent has slipped down to 25th place, out of 33, relative to other London boroughs.

5.5 For 2015/16 there has been a significant reduction in the total of Council Tax Support granted, largely due to falling unemployment. This continues the trend from 2014/15.

The total granted for 2014/15 was £26.6m, compared to an anticipated £25.5m in 2015/16 (although this may fluctuate during the year, depending on economic conditions). Since CTS was introduced in April 2013 the trend has been continually downwards. There has also been an increase in cash collectable as a result of new properties coming in to rating (1,300 new properties have come in to rating since September 2014 – this compares to an increase of 534 Band D equivalents between September 2013 and September 2014). The overall effect of this (including the reduction in CTS) is to increase Brent's share of the collectable income by approximately £2.5m. Therefore even if the overall collection rate fell slightly compared to last year, the actual amount of income will increase substantially. The legislative position is that the financial benefit of this is translated through to the general fund in 2016/17, through the council tax base and, if appropriate, collection fund surplus.

- 5.6 For NNDR, the total amount collectable is £114.0m (of which Brent retains a 30% share) and the collection rate target is 97.7%. As at May 2015, the collection rate was 19.8%, compared to 19.2% in May 2014. Therefore overall collection is slightly up on last year, and early indications are that collection should be similar or slightly above last year's final figure of 98.1%. Monthly collection percentages for NNDR are more volatile than for Council Tax, as they are affected by changes in the Rating List (e.g. if a property with a large rates bill comes in to rating during the month, until a payment is made this will reduce the overall collection percentage, or if one is removed from rating or has a substantial rateable value reduction the collection percentage will increase until the refund due is made). This has much more effect than for Council Tax, as an individual property's NNDR bill can be several hundred thousand pounds (or in rare instances over £1m). 25 properties in Brent have a bill of over £0.5m. Early indications are that the final collection rate for 2015/16 will be around 98.3%.
- 5.7 In 2013/14 Brent collected 97.6% of the total NNDR due. This was the 17th highest of the London boroughs, up from 20th the previous year. The London average was 98.4%. Collection is higher in inner London, with the outer London average being 97.8%. The 98.1% collection rate in 2014/15, a 0.5% improvement on the previous year, leaves Brent as the 18th highest performer out of 33 boroughs.
- 5.8 <u>Parking debt</u> is analysed by measuring the total number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued against the expected yield of the total debt raised, as shown below:

Period	Debt Raised £m	Issued PCNs	Forecast £m	Cash collected on 14/15 PCNs £m	Cash collected from previous years debt £m	Total cash collected £m
Q1 Average 14/15	1.3	14,626	0.73	0.5	0.2	0.7
Q2 Average14/15	1.1	13,259	0.7	0.6	0.1	0.7
Q3 Average14/15	1	12,389	0.7	0.6	0	0.6
Q4 Average14/15	1.1	13,932	0.7	0.6	0	0.6
Apr-15	1.2	14,170	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.8
May-15	1	14,345	0.7	0.5	0.2	0.7

- 5.9 Whilst there are variations in the number of PCNs issued each month, the level of revenue forecast remains broadly the same as 2014/15, representing around 64% of the value of issued PCNs. The method of forecasting income within Parking is based on a prevailing 18 month PCN yield multiplied by the number of PCN issued per month. Of the £1.2m outstanding PCN income as at the end of 2014/2015, £0.6m (52%) has been recovered to date.
- 5.10 Slightly more PCNs were issued in the first quarter of 2015/16 than forecast, taking account of seasonal factors. However following the severe restrictions on CCTV enforcement of parking contraventions imposed by the Deregulation Act on 1 April 2015, the overall composition of the PCNs has changed significantly; there has been a 95% reduction in the quantity of CCTV-issued parking PCNs. A greater emphasis is now placed on Civil Enforcement Officer-issued PCNs, as anticipated when the council's budget was set. From July 2015 there will also be more emphasis on tackling Moving Traffic contraventions, following the installation of additional enforcement cameras.
- 5.11 <u>HRA Council Tenant debt</u> is analysed in three categories; Current Tenants, Former Tenants and Other Non-Rental Debts.

The table below shows the balances for 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Period	Current Tenants	Former Tenants	Other	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Q2 Average 14/15	1,434	619	574	2,626
Q3 Average 14/15	1,558	626	567	2,751
Q4 Average 14/15	1,551	531	587	2,669
Apr-15	1,469	557	627	2,653
May-15	1,526	619	618	2,763

5.12 Overall debt has increased from £2.653m in April to £2.763m in May. This indicates a 4.1% increase in outstanding debt compared to the previous month, which is directly attributable to the level of bad debt provision provided to cover any anticipated loss of income.

The level of tenant debt reflects:

- An increasing number of residents claiming they are unable to pay their rent. This is
 due to changes in employment, changes in benefit rates and people who are in
 employment but now not eligible to claim housing benefit as they are just above the
 threshold.
- Debt Relief Orders and IVA are becoming more increasing.
- DWP sanctions are increasing.
- Court hearings being adjourned due to the tenants citing disrepair.
- Issues with successions and introductory tenancies which are having an impact on arrears.
- 5.13 Approximately 22% of the total debt at the end of May relates to Former Tenants arrears where tenants have left their properties owing rent to the Council. These debts have been transferred to 1stLocate to chase and collect, which will commence by the end of June 2015.

6.0 Capital

6.1 The following table sets out the 2015/16 Capital budget and forecast as at the end of May 2015. The Amended Budget column reflects the budget position inclusive of the proposed budget carry forward (slippage) from 2014/15 to 2015/16. The primary areas of slippage in the 2014/15 outturn related to Regeneration and Growth, Environment and Neighbourhoods and the HRA. In some instances, due to the increased expenditure in 2014/15, the 2015/16 budget has been reduced to compensate for the shift in spend.

Service Area	2015/16 Original Budget £m	2015/16 Amended Budget £m	2015/16 Forecast Outturn	Forecast Variance
Adult Services	2.3	2.2	£m 2.2	£m
Children and Young People	0.3	0.2	0.2	0
Chief Operating Officer	0.5	0.2	0.2	
Communications	0.4	0.5	0.5	0
Culture & Heritage	1.4	2.4	2.4	0
Recycling & Waste/Public Realm	0.1	0.3	0.3	0
Transportation - General Fund	4.2	4.5	4.5	0
Transportation - TfL	3.8	3.8	3.8	0
Regeneration & Growth				
School Expansion Schemes	65.4	72	72	0
South Kilburn Regeneration	22.1	24.4	24.4	0
Private Housing	4.9	5.9	5.9	0
New Accommodation for Independent Living	5	5.3	5.3	0
The Library at Willesden Green	9.5	9.7	9.7	0
Schools (Non Expansions)	5	6	6	0
Strategic Property	3.4	5.2	5.2	0
Affordable Housing	1.5	1.5	1.5	0
Facilities Management	0.9	1.7	1.7	0
Planning, Landscaping and Major Projects	0.8	1.6	1.6	0
Regeneration & Growth (HRA)				
Affordable Housing	7.1	7.1	7.1	0
Major Repairs & Improvements	41.7	44.7	44.7	0
Total	179.8	199	199	0

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 This report is entirely concerned with Finance and the detail is contained in the body of the report.

8.0 Legal Implications

8.1 There are no legal implications arising form this report.

9.0 Diversity Implications

9.1 There are no diversity implications arising from this report.

10.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

10.1 There are no staffing/accommodation implications arising from this report.

11.0 Contact Officers

11.1

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CONRAD HALL Chief Finance Officer