

Quarter 2 2017/18 financial Monitoring Questions from G. Waller

1. Why (para 2.1.1) were the costs for the outstanding planning claim some 23% higher than the original estimate? Is this a case of deliberately underestimating in order to make the estimate seem more palatable?

The original £68k budget was an estimate. As with any claim, it is difficult to estimate the extent of legal support required as this will depend on various factors. The report outlines the full costs incurred in a transparent way rather than add them to the existing legal budget.

2. (para 2.1.1) Given the significant set up costs for green waste collection (estimated at c £80K: £20k more than originally reported) at what point does the green bin charge begin to have a positive impact on the budget; i.e. that all collection charges are covered by the charge?

The administration costs of £60k per year are as reported in the original Cabinet report. This included the set up costs being spread over the first 5 years of the scheme. This will be achieved paying back the set up costs to the spend to save reserve. Of the £80k, £20k relates primarily to staff costs associated with registering households. Whilst the service begins in April 2018, we have to incur some cost in 17/18 so effectively we are bringing forward the cost from 18/19. The charge

itself will have a positive impact from 18/19 as our MTFP includes the cost of bin collection already but does not include the income. The financial aim of the service is to break even as we are not allowed to make a profit. We anticipate covering over 70% of all our costs for green waste collection (including overheads) in year 1 but this will depend on take up.

3. Why has there been an increase in SEN transport requirements? What has been done to reduce the costs? How many SEN journeys do we pay for which are not used (e.g. taxi arriving at child's home to take child to school but child is not going because of hospital appointment)? How actively do we offer parental mileage for home to school transport for SEN children?

There has been an increase of 3 SEN students requiring transport this academic year but this is not the main cause of the increase. There are 3 individual students who have enhanced needs which has meant we have had to introduce transport options specifically tailored to meet their needs. 1 of the students requires regular heart massage and travels with a heart monitor and vital stats machine. This requires a specialist transport company to provide a medically equipment and a medically trained passenger assistant. The other 2 students have complicated risk assessments relating to their potential to hurt themselves and others so we have had to procure black-cab type

transport by utilising operators recommended by Peterborough City Council.

We continually monitor the contracts that we have and whenever any new/revised transport is required. We attempt to add this to our in-house transport routes first and then existing external contracts if this is not possible. We communicate with the operators of contracts frequently and contribute to the EHCP reviews for students transported. There have been a small number of students where we have been able to challenge the need for a passenger assistant and have been able to reduce subsidy this way by implementing an individual risk assessment and/or specialist equipment instead of paying for a passenger assistant to be present on every journey. We have also made more recommendations in the past year for older students to be considered for travel training to prepare them for independent travel on public transport.

The number of unused journeys is minimal within the area of SEN transport. Mostly this affects the children looked after (CLA) transport area due to the continual change nature of cases. On our in-house routes and all external taxi contracts for SEN, parents and transport teams communicate very effectively with each other to reduce the chances of wasted resources. On the whole, most parents/carers are making calls early enough if students will not be travelling.

Whenever transport cannot be catered for by re-routing existing provision (i.e. at minimal cost), we obtain quotations for new transport and calculate the parental mileage cost to work out the most cost-effective choice. If parental mileage represents best value we offer this to the parents/carers.

4. How are we monitoring the efficacy of the Permanency and Protection service? We are clearly investing in it (it is responsible for a significant overspend in the People Directorate) but how many children has it kept out of care and what is the average expenditure per child/family for this service C/F where a child/family does go into care?

The Protection and Permanency Service is a statutory service that has two key roles. The first is to protect and safeguard children, reducing risk and preventing them escalating into care. The other role is to support children who have been placed in care by the courts.

There has been an over spend in the costs associated with this service these are due to the following:

- The family support fund is overspending due to a number of families requiring additional support in order to reduce the likelihood of the children being taken into care thereby reducing potential costs in the future.

- The Children Looked After is overspending due to an increase in costs associated with parental contact visits for children placed out of county, but placed with family members. The additional cost is while we support these families to obtain a Special Guardianship Order, therefore the long term costs are much reduced.
- Children's Social Care Staffing is forecasting an overspend due to the need to use agency staff to cover vacant posts. However, we are seeing a significant decrease in the use of agency staff and are working hard to recruit to permanent posts (we only have 3 agency staff, 1 covering maternity and 2 covering a vacancy so this has already reduced significantly)

In terms of reducing the number of children entering care we have had 9 children who were in PLO (Public Law Outline), this is where the children have met threshold to be removed but we are doing 'pre-proceedings work. Due to support and work being undertaken by this service in the last three months we have prevented these children entering the care system and they have stepped down to Child Protection as they no longer meet threshold for issuing court proceedings. We have also supported 12 children to remain living at home following proceedings under Supervision Order. Again, this is instead of entering the care system and this ensures future costs of care are significantly reduced. This is the highest number of supervision orders Rutland have seen and demonstrates the

service supporting families to remain together and only using care system as the last resort.

If these children were in care this would take the overall numbers for Rutland up to around 60. Whilst nationally there has been a significant increase in CLA, locally we have not seen to the same level of increase in Rutland due to our service preventing children coming into care.

We currently have 40 children looked after and over the next 6 months there are plans for at least 10 of them to cease being looked after and be living with family on a SGO.

The Protection and Permanency Service has actually only placed 8 children into care in the year so far. Further overall 93 children have been taken off a children in need plan, and 39 children taken off a child protection plan, so far this year after risks were successfully reduced.

The average cost of a child in care is as follows:

	<u>Current Actual Unit cost per week</u>
Foster Allowances	£193.29
Connected Persons	£211.08
Fostering Fees	£146.15
Independent Fostering	£790.29
Special Guardianship Orders	£165.32
Residential	£3,322.26*

*Relates to a very small number of very complex placements

5. (Appendix H 7) Why has there been a delay in implementing the Facilities Management Contract? Will there be any saving in 2018/19?

There will be no saving in 18/19 but one anticipated in 19/20.

6. (MTFP Assumptions). What impact will the decision regarding Places structure made by Council on 13/11/17 have on the MTFP?

As per the Council report, the changes could increase the budget by c£120k. Of course, this will depend on the new Director and the structure that is ultimately implemented. Final costs could be lower.

7. (Para 1.3.3 iii) Is the additional spend in school improvement designed to raise attainment in primary schools? (See my questions on Q2 Performance Management)

This is linked to the 2 commissioned projects which span over the two financial years

One, Inclusion Begins in the Classroom, which is to support primary schools in meeting the wider needs of children in mainstream schools, so will support improved achievement. The second, which is the Peer Review Programme, will

strengthen school to school support and challenge which again will support improved achievement.

8. (Para 1.3.3 iv) What is being done to analyse the costs of care packages that will reduce the likelihood of future reports of overspends in children with disabilities (£75k this time)? What has been done to analyse trend data so that we can better predict future need? What has been done to analyse the future needs of children and families currently receiving support to ensure we as a Council are providing support which meets need but is as low cost as possible?

The amount spent on care packages is reported as an overspend as it exceeds the budget. However, in areas such as special educational needs and disability where we are required to respond to a statutory need, an increase in spend above budget (whilst technically classed as an overspend) should be seen in this context. As has been discussed at Scrutiny previously, we are reluctant to increase budgets to give them 'slack' to accommodate potential new cases. We would rather report an 'overspend'.

The cost of care packages is constantly under review across all areas. At Q1 it was reported that an independent consultant on a contingent fee contract confirmed the Council achieved good VFM on placement costs and was able to find only limited savings.

Individual care packages are reviewed on an ongoing weekly basis. In relation to this group, needs rarely reduce over time so the likelihood of an existing client costing less from a needs perspective is very low.

In terms of trends, the number of children receiving support is low and therefore not considered to be helpful for predicting trends.