

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL AND SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL
TRADING STANDARDS JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE: 4 NOVEMBER 2024
LEAD OFFICER: AMANDA POOLE
HEAD OF TRADING STANDARDS
SUBJECT: JOINT SERVICE BUDGET

1.0 SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

- 1.1 The Joint Committee regularly reviews and sets the Service budget.
- 1.2 The information provided shows that the Joint Service budget is forecasting a break even position against the budget for 2024-25 agreed by the Joint Committee in April 2024. However, within this there are some pressures (income) being offset by holding vacant posts. Legal costs remain uncertain.
- 1.3 The Medium-Term Financial Planning process for April 2025 onwards is currently being undertaken in both partner local authorities and the Service approach is being developed in consultation with the Trading Standards Board.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Trading Standards Joint Committee:
 - 2.1.1 notes the forecast outturn for the joint service budget for 2024/25

3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 3.1 The Joint Committee is required by the Inter Authority Agreement which underpins the service to:
 - a) Maintain financial oversight of the Service and ensure sound financial management.

4.0 BUDGET 23/24:

- 4.1 The costs of the Joint Service are divided between the partner Local Authorities in the proportion: 34% Buckinghamshire and 66% Surrey, which includes any under or over spends.



- 4.2 There are several factors which introduce volatility to the budget. The service has an income budget of £658k, equivalent to 23.9% of its gross budget. It is challenging to accurately predict income and it's timing especially where costs are recovered from prosecutions, or where market conditions are changing.
- 4.3 In terms of the larger scale economic situation, including the way that local authority budgets are under pressure, we have particularly seen the impact of this on our Primary Authority Partnerships, including with our network of Primary Authority advice providers (other local authorities). We are forecasting £45k less income compared to budget for the year which we are offsetting through holding vacant posts.
- 4.4 In relation to court outcomes that at times lead to costs being recovered, this remains unpredictable. Between 2020 and the start of this year we had seen no trials for more complex cases go ahead, instead they were repeatedly adjourned – delaying the costs. However, in positive operational news, this year we have had two longer trials begin (one went the full 5 days before the defendant was found guilty, in the other the defendant pleaded guilty on day 1). The uncertainty around this adds to the difficulty of accurately forecasting court related costs and affects the recovery of those costs. The Service manages its' budget closely to even out the most volatile factors where it is possible.

2024/25 Forecast Outturn

- 4.5 The agreed budget for 2024/25 totals £2,753,000.
- 4.6 The current forecast is to breakeven. However, within this there are some pressures (income) being offset by holding vacant posts. Legal costs remain uncertain.

Summary by expenditure type	Full Year 24/25 Budget £'000	End of Year Forecast £'000
Employee related spend	3,143	3,058
Non-staffing expenditure	267	307
EXPENDITURE:	3,410	3,365
INCOME:	-658	-613
Total Net Expenditure	2,752	2,752
<u>Buckinghamshire Council Contribution</u>	936	936
<u>Surrey County Council Contribution</u>	1,817	1,817

2025/26 Planning

- 4.7 Medium Term Financial Planning is underway in both Councils, but it is too early in the process to have a final proposed budget for the Joint Committee to consider, this will be brought to the spring meeting. However, in the meantime the TS Board have been and will continue to be engaged in developing budget ideas.

5.0 CONSULTATION:

- 5.1 No external consultation has taken place. However, finance teams from both partner Councils are involved in developing budget proposals as part of the medium term financial planning which will be brought back to this committee at the Spring meeting.

6.0 RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 All significant risks affecting the service (which include items beyond budget) are regularly considered by the management team (two monthly for red and amber risks, 6 monthly for green risks).
- 6.2 Where risks become higher, these are shared with the Trading Standards Board for awareness and discussion.

7.0 FINANCIAL & VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Service has delivered all elements of the original business case. Reasons for the forecast budget outturn position for 2024/25 are given above.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The 2015 Inter-Authority Agreement provides the legal framework within which the Service operates.
- 9.2 There are no specific legal issues that need to be drawn to the attention of the Committee.

10.0 EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY

- 10.1 The budget forecast outturn being reported will not impact on residents or staff with different protected characteristics, as such an Equality Impact Assessment has not been included.

11.0 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

- 11.1 The budget will continue to be monitored and managed by the Service Management team and will be reported back to the Joint Committee at each of its meetings.

REPORT DETAILS

Contact Officer(s):

Mrs Amanda Poole, Head of Trading Standards 07984 458 679

Consulted:

Annexes:

None

Sources/background papers:

ENDS