

MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL

6 FEBRUARY 2024

ITEM 5(i) – AMENDMENT TO ITEM 5 - 2024/25 FINAL BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2028/29

Item 5(i)

Amendment by Catherine Powell (Farnham North) to item 5 – 2024/25 Final Budget and Medium-Term Finance Strategy to 2028/29

Seconder: Jonathan Essex (Redhill East)

Introduction

Whilst the budget narrative places an emphasis on enhancing preventative services in the community, this proposed amendment recognises a need to fund more early intervention, prevention and support services in Adults' and Children's Services that specifically targets some of our most vulnerable residents, particularly in deprived areas, as well as reducing pressures on statutory services.

The Children's, Families and Lifelong Learning Select Committee has raised concerns about the current levels of support provided to parents and carers of children with SEND and the long-term impacts this is having on children and their families. There is also a clear need to do more to encourage more foster carers and provide more support to existing foster carers.

The Adults, Wellbeing and Health Select Committee recommended that given the known trend of rising demand and rising costs, the Council needed to do more to meet the objective set in Section 2 of the Care Act 2014 of "Preventing needs for care and support" by:

- Developing community-based approaches to keeping residents healthy and in their own homes;
- Reducing the overall market demand for high-cost care services by refocusing efforts on prevention;
- Maximising the use of Technology Enabled Care including making the service available Surrey-wide as soon as possible for both self-funders and Surrey funded service users;

This amendment seeks to address the recommendations of these two committees alongside more recent challenges.

Recommendations

Council is asked to approve the following budget proposals, which are aimed specifically at providing support for some of the most vulnerable residents in Surrey in a targeted way, as well as establishing an ongoing funding source to ensure future funding for preventative activities:

- 1. Further investment in SEND Play and Leisure to address increased demand, track and address the waiting lists.**

***Budget commitment:** £0.5m additional ongoing revenue budget to enable providers to address increased demand due to increased numbers of children with EHCPs, tackle waiting lists and collate information on on-going demand for services to prevent escalation of need and family breakdown.*

- 2. Provide funding to support the expansion of the current pilot, where providers of SEND Play and Leisure or Overnight respite groups would allow parents and carers to fund a session or place using their personal allowances, when they are struggling to recruit Personal Assistants (PAs) to provide respite and support.**

***Budget commitment:** One-off spend of £0.05m to enable providers to create the additional capacity required to enable parents and carers to spend personal allowances on Play and Leisure or Overnight respite places / sessions where PAs cannot be sourced after the current pilot finishes.*

- 3. Support the implementation and roll out of the Surrey Fosters Carers Charter, developed alongside the Surrey Foster Carers Association, to support Foster Carers retention and recruitment and ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in their care.**

***Budget commitment:** One-off spend of £0.3m to fund temporary additional roles within the Fostering Service and other engaged council services, dedicated to working alongside partner organisations including the Surrey Foster Carer Association to ensure that the Charter is fully implemented within 6 months.*

- 4. Additional support in schools for neurodiverse children, specifically those in areas of high deprivation.**

***Budget commitment:** £0.7m additional ongoing revenue budget to enable the service to increase the reach of existing mechanisms and add services for primary schools in areas of high deprivation to support neurodiverse children in mainstream schools.*

- 5. Additional revenue budget to create a fund to enable local communities to deliver Strength and Balance Classes in deprived areas and rural villages.**

***Budget commitment:** £0.2m additional ongoing revenue budget to support communities in deprived areas and rural villages with no regular bus service to create a fund for local communities to access, to provide strength and balance classes to support fall prevention and stroke rehabilitation as well as reducing social isolation.*

- 6. Accelerate the roll out of Technology Enabled Care**

***Budget commitment:** £0.25m of ongoing funding to accelerate the roll out of technology enabled care across Surrey. This budget will cover further additional staffing for the extension of the existing scheme to cover the whole of Surrey over the next 2 years and to establish of an option for anyone to self-fund, at a fixed cost.*

- 7. The establishment of a fund, created through voluntary contributions from residents, to provide an ongoing revenue funding source for specific early intervention, preventative and support services for residents in most need.**

The financial impacts are either requirements for initial one-off funding sources or ongoing budget requirements and, if approved, would result in changes to the Directorate envelopes of the Childrens, Families & Lifelong Learning Directorate and the Adults, Wellbeing & Health Partnerships Directorate in 2024/25.

Table 1. Summary of budget proposals

Proposal	2024-25 & annual ongoing revenue impact	One-Off costs	Notes
1. Children Services: Further investment in SEND Play and Leisure to tackle increase in demand, track and address the waiting lists to prevent escalating need and family breakdown	£500,000		Ongoing
2. Childrens Services: Provide funding to support the expansion of the current pilot whereby personal allowances can be used to fund a place at a SEND Play and Leisure or Overnight Respite.		£50,000	One-off funding for Year 1 only
3. Childrens Services: Support the implementation and roll out of the Surrey Fosters Carers Charter within 6 months to support Foster Carers retention and recruitment and ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in their care.		£300,000	One-off funding for Year 1 only
4. Children’s Services: Provide additional support for schools in areas of high deprivation for neurodiverse children in mainstream schools.	£700,000		Effectiveness to be reviewed to determine strategy for Year 2 and beyond
5. Adults’ Social Care: Additional budget to create a fund to enable local communities to deliver Strength and Balance Classes.	£200,000		On-going
6. Adults Social Care: Accelerate the roll out of Technology Enabled Care	£250,000		
7. Voluntary Contribution Fund The establishment of a fund, created through voluntary contributions from residents, to provide an ongoing funding source for specific early intervention, preventative and support services for residents in most need.			Minimal promotional & administrative costs anticipated to set up. Donations to be utilised to provide ongoing financial support for prevention activities into the medium term
	£1,650,000	£350,000	

Proposed Funding

In order to maintain a balanced budget position, the following funding sources are proposed to finance the increases required to support these proposals. The funding sources are listed below in order of priority, with option one being the preferred method of funding and the options following to be considered in order, should the first option not prove sufficient:

1. Allocation of any additional funds announced in the Final Local Government Settlement, over and above the £5m allocated in the final budget proposals to specific preventative activities in Children's Services.
2. Consolidating services and leadership roles across the Communication, Engagement and Public Affairs and the Customer & Communities Directorates.
3. Use of reserves for year one investment with ongoing costs incorporated into the budget planning process for 2025/26 onwards.

Basis for the Recommendations:

Further details on each of the proposed recommendations are provided below.

1. Further investment in SEND Play and Leisure to address increased demand, track and address the waiting lists.

***Budget commitment:** £0.5m additional ongoing revenue budget to enable providers to address increased demand due to increased numbers of children with EHCPs, tackle waiting lists and collate information on on-going demanded for services to prevent escalation of need and family breakdown.*

Current Commitments

In response to the recommendation of the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning Select Committee, the final budget proposal re-instates the funding for play and leisure short breaks that was previously reallocated to statutory overnight short breaks services, as well as including additional funding to ensure there is sufficient budget to commission the same capacity of play and leisure provision in 2024/25 as in 2022/23. Within this, there is a higher level of provision of capacity that is available to enable children and young people who require 1-to-1 support to access short breaks, in response to the changing profile of need in Surrey. Whilst this is a positive change, it is recognised that demand and waiting lists remain high.

Proposed Budget Amendment

Council is asked to increase the budgets for SEND short breaks, stay & play and youth groups to address the increase in demand associated with the increase in the number of children with EHCPs by creating new schemes / extending existing schemes to start to address the multi-year waiting lists that currently exist, whilst also creating a better picture of demand and what is needed to prevent escalating need and family breakdown, including for children that do not require 1:1 support.

The EIA associated with the 2023/24 budget proposals ([\(Equality Impact Assessment - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)\)](#)) identified that the number of children with Education, Health and Care Plans aged 0-18 had increased by 65% since the last time the services were commissioned and that the costs to charities to provide the services had significantly increased. These additional funds will go some way to addressing the associated increase in demand that will not be addressed by the budget increase included in the current budget.

- 2. Provide funding to support the expansion of the current pilot, where providers of SEND Play and Leisure or Overnight respite would allow parents and carers to fund a session / place using their personal allowances, when then are struggling to spend Personal Assistants (PAs) to provide some respite and support.**

Budget commitment: *One-off spend of £0.05m to enable providers to create the additional capacity required to enable parents / carers to spend personal allowances on Play and Leisure or Overnight respite sessions / places where PAs cannot be sourced after the pilot finishes.*

Current Commitments

The service recognises the challenge of recruiting personal assistants and as a result are piloting a model within the existing Direct Payment policy to offer places to families to utilise this funding for short breaks, rather than having to source a PA. If the pilot is successful, the intention is to roll this out to other providers. The cost of the pilot, relating to underwriting the increased capacity required by providers, is being funded from within existing budgeted resources.

Proposed Budget Amendment

The allocation of £50k of funding to ensure that there are no barriers the roll out of this practice, subject to the success of the pilot and to ensure that all social workers are aware that personal allowances can be used in this way to maximise its use to prevent escalation of need and avoid family breakdown.

- 3. Support the implementation and roll out of the Surrey Fosters Carers Charter, developed alongside the Surrey Foster Carers Association, to support Foster Carers retention and recruitment and ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in their care.**

Budget commitment: *One off spend of £0.3m to fund temporary additional roles within the Fostering Services and other engaged SCC Services, dedicated to working alongside partner organisations including the Surrey Foster Carer Association to ensure that the Charter is fully implemented within 6 months.*

Current Commitments

The Fostering Service is committed to the Surrey Foster Carers Charter, as developed by the Surrey Foster Carers Association, and agreed at the Corporate Parenting Board. The Fostering Service agree it is vital for the benefit of the children as well as the support, retention and recruitment of Surrey foster carers.

Proposed Budget Amendment

The Council is asked to support a specific investment of £300k as one-off expenditure to fund additional capacity to enable dedicated resources to ensure the timely implementation of the Foster Carer Charter. The implementation will require multi-disciplinary collaboration, involving several services within the Council (e.g. Fostering, Education, SEND), Health colleagues, the Surrey Foster Carer Association and members of the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that the Charter is fully implemented within 6 months.

Implementing this Charter will provide certainty that Surrey County Council and other stakeholders will provide the support that Foster Carers and the children in their care

require to support placement stability, foster carer retention and positive outcomes for children placed with foster carers, whilst also creating a clear statement of support from the Council to assist with foster carer recruitment.

The current challenges in recruitment and retention of Foster Carers are clear as the Month 8 financial report included in the Cabinet papers for the 30th of January 2024 advise an underspend “*on in-house fostering due to a lower number of children supported through in-house foster carers (£1.1m)*”.

4. Provide additional support in schools for neurodiverse children, specifically those in areas of high deprivation.

Budget commitment: £0.7m additional ongoing revenue budget to enable the service to increase the reach of existing mechanisms and add services for primary schools in areas of high deprivation to support neurodiverse children in mainstream schools.

Current Commitments

Current and planned activity in these areas form part of the Council’s Inclusion Strategy and Transformation programme. There are a number of initiatives in place to support children including:

- As part of the Surrey All Age Autism Strategy we have developed an Autism Review for schools which concludes with a report including positive suggestions about changes they could make to make the environment more autism aware.
- developing the service delivered by our STiPs team which supports children with a wide range of need and are rolling out the Team Around the School programme following a very successful pilot.
- The Inclusion and Innovation Programme, developed with the Schools Forum, focusing on creating autism friendly schools and well as emotional well-being and supporting successful transitions.
- further development of the Autism Outreach programme delivered by a partnership of Surrey specialist schools with primary focus on support for mainstream schools. This support includes Early Years children from the age of 3 years.
- delivering training through partners on Suicide Prevention with a focus on autistic young people, training of Pathological Demand Avoidance and a full day event called Behind the Mask which explores understanding and support for autistic girls.

There is a great deal of activity underway and it is essential that we align and coordinate activities to avoid duplication or overlap.

Proposed Budget Amendment

The Council asked to provide £700k for additional support for Primary Schools in areas of deprivation for neurodiverse children who require additional support in a mainstream environment. This support is likely to benefit all children at these schools and will be provided in addition to current Surrey wide provision.

The proposal is to target this support at all schools in, or servicing, the 18 Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that are decile 1 for the Children and Young People Sub-domain, the 27 LSOAs that are decile 2 for the Children and Young People Sub-domain and the remaining LSOAs that are included 21 key Neighbourhoods.

The first step will be to identify the schools in these areas and the current outcomes associated with these schools, including academic attainment and attendance.

The second step will be to review existing SCC projects and programmes to identify those that could be specifically targeted at these schools.

The final step would be to look at the specific challenges that schools supporting these more deprived areas have and to provide additional support, for example:

- Additional funded support through STiPs and our specialist schools
- Environmental reviews of each school to identify potential interventions that could improve the environment, for example, quiet / sensory room and / or a minimal distraction area in school and / or classrooms so that every neurodiverse child can take themselves for quiet time if they need to self-regulate.
- Support for screening for dyslexia based on the British Dyslexia Association checklist with a funded position for a BDA Approved Assessor.
- If successful, this would need to be considered alongside the whole SEN sufficiency work and the high needs recovery plan and could be rolled out to a wider range of schools in future years.

5. Additional revenue budget to create a fund to enable local communities to deliver Strength and Balance Classes.

***Budget commitment:** £0.2m additional ongoing revenue budget to support communities in deprived areas and rural villages with no regular bus service to create a fund for local communities to access, to provide strength and balance classes to support fall prevention and stroke rehabilitation as well as reducing social isolation.*

Current Commitments

The Public Health Team recognise the benefits that effective strength and balance classes can bring to physical, and mental health. Active Surrey already promotes a number of targeted classes in line with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Any additional roll out of classes would need to ensure there was no duplication and that classes were of the required standard.

In addition, the administration of such classes needs to be proportionate, so mechanisms to deliver should be looked at alongside the opportunity to incorporate these proposals into the strategic transformation work around prevention, with links to Better Care Fund budgets.

Proposed Budget Amendment

Investment to be targeted at communities in deprived areas (21 key neighbourhoods or one of the 24 LSOA which are decile 1, 2 or 3 for the Income Deprivation Affecting Older People (IDAOPI) decile) and rural villages with no regular bus service to create a fund for local communities to access, to provide sustained strength and balance classes to support fall prevention and stroke rehabilitation as well as reducing social isolation.

It is proposed grant funding of £1,500 - £2,000 per year be allocated to community groups to set up and run courses for at least 25 weeks in any one year in community centres, village halls and churches in the heart of local communities and populations in need. Wherever possible a local resource should be identified to run the courses.

The intention would be to make these schemes self-sustaining where possible after the first year, where attendees can afford to fund and /or match funding can be sourced for example, from the NHS, where this is not possible this fund will provide continuity of funding.

Data will be gathered on the impact of these courses after each quarter so that effectiveness can be established and reviewed as part of future budgets.

6. Accelerate the roll out of Technology Enabled Care

Budget commitment: £0.25m of ongoing funding to support accelerated roll out of technology enabled care across Surrey. This budget will cover further additional staffing for the extension of the existing scheme to cover the whole of Surrey over the next 2 years and to establish of an option for anyone to self-fund, at a fixed cost.

Current Commitments

The Council is committed to the expansion of and investment in Technology Enabled Care Services (TECS), which is already part of the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Partnerships (AWHP) transformation plans for 2024/25 and beyond.

Funding of c £750k is available through the Better Care Fund and plans are being developed alongside health partners.

As part of AWHP's refreshed transformation plans the directorate is also planning to continue funding for three current temporary transformation funded roles dedicated to progressing the ambition to expand the use of TECS. The plan is to secure funding for eighteen months from April 2024 at a total planned cost of just over £250k as part of the final AWHP transformation business case, which is expected to be presented to Cabinet for approval in quarter 1 2024/25.

The self-funder offer business case will form part of developing the TECS strategy.

Proposed Budget Amendment

Council is asked to identify an additional £0.25m of ongoing funding to support the accelerated roll out of technology enabled care ([Technology enabled care: Surrey Connected Care - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)) across Surrey.

This budget will be used for further additional staffing to cover the acceleration of the extension of the existing scheme to cover the whole of Surrey over the next 2 years and to establish an option for anyone to self-fund, at a fixed cost.

7. The establishment of a fund, created through voluntary contributions from residents, to provide an ongoing funding source for specific early intervention, preventative and support services for residents in most need.

Proposed Budget Amendment

Introduce the Surrey Community Contribution Scheme to fund specific targeted early intervention, prevention and support services in our most deprived and isolated communities.

This fund would not be spent on Statutory Services, only non-statutory services that deliver frontline services through the VCFS.

Voluntary donations to the fund would be encouraged from any resident.

The donations would go directly to a ringfenced fund within Community Foundation Surrey and all those contributing would be asked if they would like their donation to be subject to Gift Aid (adding 25p to every £1 donated).

The target would be to raise £2m per year, this equates equating to less than £100 per year being donated by every Band H household.

In future years, resident or member consultation could be undertaken to prioritise areas of revenue investment, with a cross party group of councillors recommending any changes, based on the level of donations received and the impacts of the funding, in December for incorporation into the budget. The intention is to create a stable and secure revenue funding stream for proven frontline preventative, early intervention, and support services particularly for areas of high deprivation.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

The financial information set out in these proposals has been developed in consultation with officers from the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning Directorate, the Adults, Wellbeing & Health Partnership Directorate and Finance.

All proposals are deemed to be viable and within the legal powers of the Council to implement.

Proposals 2 and 3 request one-off funding for 2024/25 only, with all other proposals requiring ongoing revenue funding. The total investment required in relation to these proposals is £1,650,000 on an ongoing basis, with an additional ask of a further £350,000 in 2024/25, bringing the 2024/25 total to £2,000,000.

Proposal 7 recommends the establishment of a voluntary contribution fund. The mechanism to administer and collect contributions needs to be developed. If successful, this would provide a future income stream to support further preventative activities. It is not suggested that reliance is placed on this source of income to fund these proposals in 2024/25, due to the uncertainty of the level of income that would be achieved through this mechanism. Consideration would also need to be given in the future to funding ongoing activities from an income stream where the level of funding is not guaranteed on an ongoing basis.

The proposals recommend that these additional investments be funded initially from any additional funding announced in the Final Local Government Finance Settlement. The Final Budget proposed by Cabinet recommends proposals for the use of £5m of this additional funding, as announced on 24th January, to be utilised for additional preventative activities within Childrens Services. The ability to fund the investments set out in these alternative proposals would require the additional funding to be in excess of the £5m recommended to Council by Cabinet.

If additional funding were not available, then it is proposed above that a review is undertaken of the current leadership structures in place across the following two Directorates:

- Communications, Engagement & Public Affairs
- Customer & Communities

Detailed proposals are yet to be developed in relation to this and the level of efficiencies deliverable would be subject to the development of a robust business case and delivery plan. If efficiencies are insufficient to cover the investment proposed, then reserves would need to be used for the first-year costs, while other efficiencies were identified to fund these proposals on an ongoing basis.

Despite coming from a strong financial position, due to the Council's focus on financial accountability and improved financial resilience over recent years, the development of the 2024/25 budget proposals have been challenging. Continued increasing demand for key services and high inflation means that the cost of delivering services is increasing at a faster rate than our funding. The budget gap is expected to continue to grow over the medium-term financial strategy period, as demand and price pressures continue and the funding position past 2024/25 is extremely uncertain. This all results in a requirement for the Council to continue its focus on financial management, to mitigate risk and provide sustainability and resilience in the delivery of services. The proposals set out above and the investment requirements over and above those set out in budget recommended to Council by Cabinet, should be considered in light of the overall financial context.

In the event of the Final Local Government Finance Settlement providing additional funding in excess of the £5m already proposed to be utilised in 2024/25, the Council papers recommend that use of such funding is considered by Cabinet once final allocations are confirmed.