

Meeting: Overview & Scrutiny Board/Cabinet/Council **Date:** 7/20 August/12 September 2024

Wards affected: All Wards

Report Title: Budget Monitoring 2024/25 – April to June 2024 Revenue and Capital Outturn Forecast.

When does the decision need to be implemented? N/A

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1. Purpose and Introduction

- 1.1. This report provides a high-level budget summary of the Council's revenue and capital position for the financial year 2024/25, reviewing budgets and considering year-end forecasts. These forecasts are based on the levels of spend and financial information at the end of quarter 1 (up to 30 June 2024).
- 1.2. The Council continues to face external pressures due to the wide-reaching implications of the current economic situation. The levels of cost inflation have reduced significantly but continue to have an impact on Council services. We are also seeing an impact on the levels of income received, with many projections being below the levels budgeted, particularly in areas such as building control and planning. These budget pressures are resulting in a year end forecast for 2024/25 of **£0.526m overspend**.
- 1.3. The Capital Plan was reviewed and updated in 2023/24, with an updated forward looking capital programme included within the 2024/25 budget papers. An updated Capital Investment Plan is shown as Appendix 1 and highlights a revised budget for 2024/25 of £39.115m. Paragraph 7.5 provides a simple reconciliation of movement from the original budget of £19m.

2. Recommendations

Recommendations for Overview and Scrutiny Board

- 2.1. That the Overview & Scrutiny Board notes the Council's forecasted revenue outturn position and mitigating action identified and make any comments and/or recommendations to the Cabinet.

2.2. That the Overview & Scrutiny Board notes the updates to the Capital Investment Plan and the revised budget for 2024/25 and make any comments and/or recommendations to the Cabinet.

Recommendations for Cabinet/Council

2.3. That the Cabinet notes the forecasted revenue outturn position and amendments made to the published 2024/25 capital programme.

3. 2024/25 Budget Summary Position

3.1. Initial budget monitoring at quarter 1 has identified a number of spending pressures and a total overspend is forecast at year end 2024/25 of £0.526m, broken down between Council Directorates as follows:

Service	Current Budget £m	Projected Outturn £m	Est. Outturn Variance Q1 £m
Adult Services	55.800	55.752	-0.048
Children's Services	54.433	54.882	0.449
Corporate and Executive Services	13.781	14.130	0.349
Finance	-16.257	-17.057	-0.800
Investment Portfolio	-4.134	-4.134	0
Place	25.058	25.634	0.576
Public Health	10.714	10.714	0
TOTAL	139.395	139.921	0.526

3.2. The projections above include plans to draw down £144k from central contingency to rebase budgets for known spend commitments, which were unavoidable.

3.3. Mitigating spending pressures to reduce this forecast overspend by the end of the year will require robust financial management and control from all services across the Council. Financial Sustainability Plans have been completed by each Director in respect of the following key areas, which are being reviewed regularly.

- Integrated Adult Social Care contract – transformation programme
- Children's Services – social care placements
- Prevention and relief of Homelessness
- SWISCO contract fee
- Events

- Optimisation of Council Assets
- Legal Services – staffing and agency costs
- Home to School Transport

3.4. The plans for Legal service and Home to School Transport will require particular focus over the rest of the financial year as we are already projecting overspends in these areas. It is anticipated that action against these plans will mitigate pressures and reduce the overspends currently being forecast.

3.5. The Dedicated Schools, and particularly the Higher Needs Block, is not currently shown within the table above. Spend continues to be monitored as part of the safety valve agreement in order to facilitate the future write off of accumulated deficits of over £12m.

4. Service Budgets

4.1. The table below summarises the most material variances (over £100k) currently being forecast at the end of June 2024.

Service	Current Budget £m	Projected Outturn £m	Projected Q1 Outturn Variance £m
Childrens - Staffing/agency costs	20.846	21.314	0.468
Childrens - Home to School Transport	3.892	4.137	0.245
Childrens - Social care placements	23.424	23.037	(0.387)
Corporate – Legal Services	1.693	1.972	0.279
Finance – Investments and borrowing	18.572	17.772	(0.800)
Place – Waste disposal	4.832	5.082	0.250
Place – Development Control and Planning - income	0.269	0.599	0.330
Place – Building Control income	0.127	0.277	0.150
Place – Concessionary Fares	3.746	3.496	(0.250)
Place – Management of Estate	3.326	3.427	0.101
			0.386

(Note: there are other smaller variances which are not highlighted within this table hence totals will differ from those mentioned above)

Adult Services (incl. Community and Customer Services)

4.2. Within Adult Social Care the majority of spend is against a fixed price financial arrangement (contract) for the delivery of services provided by the Integrated Care Organisation (ICO). This agreement was uplifted by £5m in 2023/24, with a further £1.1m

agreed for 24/25. There is currently no significant variance being forecast within this area.

4.3. In previous years we have reported overspends within our Housing Options Service relating to increasing costs for homelessness prevention and the provision of Temporary Accommodation. Although there continues to be considerable demand in this service the total budget was increased by £900k in 24/25 and £10m has been invested in purchasing our own properties to reduced dependency on spot purchase arrangements. No material variances to budget are currently being forecast.

Children's Services

4.4. An overspend of **£468k** is being forecast due to agency numbers and costs increasing. The cost of agency in 23/24 was £2.304m, and for 24/25 the forecast is £3.159m. The number of agency FTE's at end of June 24 was 31.38, at the end of June 23 it was 23.0. We are seeing significantly increased salary expectations within the agency market and stiff competition from other Councils that are offering increased hourly rates to stabilise their own workforces and it is therefore an area that needs continued focus moving forward

4.5. There is also cost pressure within the Home to School Transport budget as a result of increasing fuel costs for transport providers as well as children and young people needing more bespoke arrangements to get to and from school. An overspend of **£245k** is forecast, but this is a reduction on spend when compared to 23/24 - due to better route planning and maximisation of shared transport where possible. A thorough review of provision is current being undertaken, including a review of single occupancy taxis, use of minibus provision and the promotion of independent travel.

4.6. Offsetting some of these pressures is an underspend currently being forecast across our budgets for children social care placements of **(£387k)**. The placements budget received £2.1m of growth funding at part of the budget setting process, and is currently showing an underspend against this new level of funding. The overall numbers of cared for children are also lower than previous years, but the significant shortage of suitable available placements is driving up costs within the market. The high cost of weekly placements for Residential and Unregulated remain a concern and risk to the budget, hence this area will continue to be monitored closely throughout the year.

4.7. Outside of Local Authority funded activities, the schools' higher needs block in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) remains under financial pressure from continual referrals for assessment for higher needs support for children.

4.8. The Council is part of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and Department for Education (DfE) Safety Valve programme, which supports councils in achieving future financial sustainability in this area. If the council can deliver on its recovery plan and achieve a balanced higher needs budget, all of the historic DSG deficit will be written off, through additional funding by ESFA.

4.9. Torbay Council has already received £7.6m from the ESFA in response to its recovery plan, without which the DSG cumulative deficit would have been £12.756m at the end of

2023/24. For 2024/25 the DSG is forecasting an overspend of £848k at quarter 1, against the forecast deficit within the agreed safety valve plan of £481k. It is of importance to the Council's future budget position that the Council delivers on its recovery plan and robust monitoring arrangements are in place.

Corporate Services

4.10. An overspend of **£0.279m** is currently being forecast within Legal Services, despite an additional £300k being added to the base budget for 2024/25. This is a result of the difficulties the service continues to face in recruiting permanent staff to meet levels of demand. This has meant the service have had to use more expensive agency staff to continue delivering legal support to services across the Council. The council have struggled to compete with the salaries paid by other organisations – both within the private and public sector. The service is now applying additional market factors and this has already made a difference to their ability to recruit and reduce their requirements of agency workers. It should be noted that recruitment of legal professionals in the public sector is a national issue.

Finance

4.11. The Finance budget area includes a wide variety of budgets including finance operations/teams, contingencies, treasury management and central grants such as Public Health and Social Care Grant. We will be reviewing how best to present these areas through the year, prior to 2025/26 budget setting.

4.12. A **£0.8m** positive variance is being forecast, mainly as a result of increased interest rates being applied on council investments. This means the Council is forecast to earn higher levels of interest on its current cash balances than was budgeted. Given the current lower levels of spend on Capital projects, there is also a saving on interest payable by the Council on the amounts borrowed.

4.13. As part of setting the 2024/25 budget a few central contingencies have been held, as in previous years. These are mainly linked to pay/inflation and other risk areas, to be released towards identified cost pressures within services. Within the first quarter these budget virements between services total £144k – but have a net nil impact across the Council.

Investment Portfolio

4.14. The Council's Investment Portfolio is forecast to contribute £4.134m towards Council activity – in line with budget. The investment property reserve is in place and maintained to cover lost rent and holding costs arising from empty units.

Place

- 4.15. Within the Place directorate an overspend of £0.576m is currently forecast, mainly due to levels of income being lower than budgeted.
- 4.16. An overspend of **£330k** is forecast in relation to shortfalls of income in Development Control - planning applications (£250k) and planning land charges (£80k), where the fees are forecast to be below budgeted levels at year end. In addition, an overspend of **£150k** is forecast within the Building Control service, mainly resulting from reduced levels of fee income. All three of these elements reflect the challenging economic position of the country and the region.
- 4.17. An overspend of **£250k** is currently forecast within the Waste Disposal budget. The budget was reduced in 24/25 in line with 23/24 levels but disposal volumes and associated costs within the first quarter of this year have been significantly higher than last year and the levels estimated.
- 4.18. An underspend of **(£250k)** is forecast against the Concessionary fares budget. The base budget was increased by £200k in 2024/25, but costs linked to the number of users are forecast to be lower than estimated.
- 4.19. An overspend of **£101k** is currently being forecast in relation to management of our Council estate. Despite underspends being forecast across a number of utility and NNDR budgets, various other budgets are projected to overspend including Paignton Library hub non-staffing budget, a shortfall of income from asset disposal and a shortfall in income from Town Hall bookings.
- 4.20. Currently Parking Services is overall forecast to break even, with any shortfall in parking income expected to be offset by enforcement income estimated to be in excess of budget.
- 4.21. SWISCo. are currently reporting a breakeven position for 2024/25 They continue to manage the financial pressures associated with rising prices, particularly fuel and material costs. Due to movements in the international markets, the value of recycled material resales dropped last year resulting in additional budget pressures, but this appears to have improved. The pay award for 2024/25 is likely to be structured in a similar way to previous years and with a fixed amount per full time employee. This has a disproportionately high percentage increase on SWISCo given the lower average salary costs, that is likely to exceed budgeted levels. As in previous years, the Council has agreed to fund the shortfall in the pay award and has held a contingency budget for this.
- 4.22. Work continues to transfer the assets from TDA to Torbay Council. Some trading activity will remain within the 24/25 financial year relating to TDA, with any projected variances reported within Torbay Council's revenue forecast. A specific budget code has been established to capture transitional costs associated with managing the transfer of TDA to Torbay Council.

Public Health

- 4.23. Overall Public Health is reporting a balanced position within its ring-fenced grant. A significant amount of spend relates to the provision of 0-19 services, which is expected to see increased spending pressures in future years, because of inflation.

5. Collection Fund

- 5.1. Collection rates levels in 2024/25 do not have any impact on the 2024/25 financial year and the collection fund equalisation reserve is maintained to manage any impact in the following year. However, current collection rates for the first quarter suggest we are on target to achieve forecast levels. We continue to explore opportunities to increase our overall collection rates, whilst supporting residents and businesses.
- 5.2. Appendix 2 highlights those debts written off over £5k relating to Council Tax, NNDR or Housing Benefit.

6. Statement of Accounts – 2021/22 2022/23 and 2023/24

- 6.1. The audit of Councils' Statement of Accounts by the Government's Statutory deadline has been highlighted previously and is a national issue, partly due to lack of capacity in the market. The audit of Torbay Council's 2021/22 Statement of Accounts has been completed and was signed off at Audit Committee on 24 July 2024.
- 6.2. The government recently consulted on options to resolve the nationwide issue of the high volume of accounts that have not had an audit opinion issued. The consultation proposed a 'backstop' option which would enable auditors to 'sign off' outstanding accounts by 30 September 2024 with minimal, if any, audit work being completed. This change has not yet been implemented due to a change in Government, but it's expected that the 2022/23 accounts for Torbay Council will not receive a full audit.
- 6.3. The ongoing audit of accounts has had an impact on preparation of the 2023/24 accounts and many Councils, including Torbay, were unable to publish their unaudited accounts for public inspection by 31 May 2024. Our 2023/24 draft Statement of Accounts was published in July 2024 and these will receive a full audit from Grant Thornton later this year.

7. Capital

- 7.1. The level of cost inflation on construction contracts remains high and along with supply chain issues continue to have an impact, with costs often exceeding initial business cases and forecasts. The viability of schemes supported by prudential borrowing are further impacted from rises in borrowing rates.

7.2. The revenue outturn position in previous years has enabled some reserves to be established to help with these costs and also assist the Council in the re-prioritisation, and ultimate delivery, of the Capital Investment Plan.

7.3. The Capital Investment Plan was reviewed and updated in 23/24, with an updated forward looking capital programme included within the 2024/25 budget papers. The refreshed plan estimated a much reduced spend of £35m over the next 3-year capital programme (2024/25-2026/27), with further projects to be moved from feasibility and development to fully approved projects throughout 2024/25, on completion and approval of robust business cases.

7.4. The Council set an original annual budget for 2024/25 of £19m. This budget will be updated at each quarter to reflect the latest position within capital projects and the discussions and reviews taking place at the Capital Growth Board (CGB).

7.5. The table below highlights a revised budget for 2024/25 of £39.115m and provides a simple reconciliation of movement from the initial budget of £19m. An updated Capital Investment Plan is shown as Appendix 1.

Budget Line/Project	Amount	Comments
Original Budget for 24/25	£18,984,000	As set in February 2024 based on 2023/24 Q3 data.
23/24 adjustments & slippage relating to schools and transport projects	£3,289,000	Relates to the balance of any under or overspend against the 23/24 budget for areas which are funded from specific ring-fenced grant.
Previously agreed inclusion - Paignton & Preston Coastal Defence	£17,047,000	Full scheme approval of £17.515m was approved within the 23/24 outturn report following Outline Business Case (OBC) to progress through procurement and technical design.
Previously agreed inclusion - Paignton Technology Park	£85,000	As per the 23/24 outturn report, initial feasibility funds allocated, primarily funded by the (LUF3) £20m grant received.
Previously agreed inclusion - Brixham Port Infrastructure	£75,000	As per the 23/24 outturn report, initial feasibility funds allocated, primarily funded by the (LUF3) £20m grant received.
Plainmoor & Admiral Swimming Pools	£170,000	Grant funding facilitated by the Council which will be transferred to Swim Torquay on completion of the grant funding agreement.
Revised Budget for 24/25	£39,115,000	

7.6. The table below highlights the projects that have been reviewed by CGB and will be drawing down funding from existing budgets in order to progress through their initial feasibility and design work packages.

Project	Initial Allocation	Project Overview
Tor Hill House (THH) lighting upgrade	£29,000 from £400k reserve.	Replacement of the current lighting within THH with energy efficient LED lights and automatic timing systems. Estimated full scheme budget of £233k from Salix grant funding and Carbon Initiative Funds. The initial fund allocations will support the project through its procurement phase up to Full Business Case (FBC) which will be expected in November 2024.
Brixham Central Carpark & Public realm	£25,000 from £400k reserve	Seeking to enhance the current carpark and introduce an additional 100 spaces and enhance the adjacent public square. £1m received from Levelling Up Fund to facilitate. The initial fund allocations will support the project through its feasibility phase up to PID which will be expected in September 2024.
Paignton Library Decarbonisation	£142,000 from £333k Climate Initiative project funding	Replacement of the boilers at Paignton library which are now end of life, with air source heat pumps. Full scheme estimated at £611,210 which will be funded from £468,747 of secured Salix grant funding and £142,463 of Climate Initiative Funds. The initial fund allocations will support the project through its design and procurement phase up to FBC which will be expected in December 2024.

7.7. The Capital Investment Plan is funded from capital receipts, capital grants and contributions, reserves and revenue budget contributions, and long-term borrowing to ensure a balanced budget over the life of the Plan.

8. Risks & Sensitivity

8.1. There are a number of financial risks facing the Council as shown below:

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Financial sustainability and write off of the DSG Deficit	High	The Council has a recovery plan approved with the Department for Education's Safety Valve programme.

Adult Social Care funding is not sufficient to meet forecast costs	High	A new five-year contract has been agreed from April 2025 and the Director of Adult Social Care is developing a range of intervention activity and savings plans, in collaboration with Health Trust colleagues.
Price increases from high inflation rates continue to have an impact on both revenue and capital costs.	Medium	The 23/24 base budget included a higher than usual allowance for inflationary pressures and contingencies are held for revenue and capital.
The “cost of living” economic impact on the Council’s residents from higher fuel and utility costs is likely to impact on both demand for council services and may result in reduced income from council tax.	Medium	The Council will continue to mitigate where possible the impact on council services and support/signpost residents to support. The council will continue to administer payments under both the Household Support Fund and Council Tax Rebates.
Unable to recruit staff and need to use agency staff.	High	Work continues to identify solutions to these challenges which seem to be on a national scale. Recruitment & retention of Social Work staff and Legal services staff continues to be challenging.
Delivery of financial sustainability plans	High	Plans will be monitored at Directors meetings to assess progress and estimates of future saving levels.
Investment Property Income changes	High	The Investment Board will continue to review future leases and manage any potential break clause implications – maintaining appropriate balances within the Investment Reserve
Temporary Accommodation – increasing demand and cost pressures within the local housing market.	High	Robust monitoring will continue, including assessing the impact from directly procuring and properties to increase the stability of accommodation options available to the Housing Options team

9. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Updated Capital Investment Plan at Q1

Appendix 2 - Write offs over £5,000 - EXEMPT