



Oversight and Governance

Chief Executive's Department
Plymouth City Council
Ballard House
Plymouth PL1 3BJ

Please ask for Jamie Sheldon
T 01752 668000
E jamie.sheldon@plymouth.gov.uk
www.plymouth.gov.uk
Published 05 February 2025

CABINET – SUPPLEMENT PACK

Monday 10 February 2025
2.00 pm
Council House, Plymouth

Members:

Councillor Evans OBE, Chair

Councillor Laing, Vice Chair

Councillors Aspinall, Briars-Delve, Coker, Cresswell, Dann, Haydon, Lowry, Penberthy.

Please find additional information enclosed for items 6,7,9 and 11.

Tracey Lee

Chief Executive

Cabinet

- | | | |
|------------|---|------------------------|
| 6. | Budget Scrutiny Recommendations | (Pages 1 - 4) |
| 7. | Cabinet Response to Budget Scrutiny Recommendations: | (Pages 5 - 10) |
| 9. | Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry 2025-2026 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme | (Pages 11 - 28) |
| 11. | Children's Services update | (Pages 29 - 40) |

Cabinet



| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Date of meeting: | 10 February 2025 |
| Title of Report: | Budget Scrutiny Recommendations |
| Lead Member: | Councillor John Stephens (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board) |
| Lead Strategic Director: | David Northey (Service Director for Finance) |
| Author: | Ross Jago (Head of Governance Performance and Risk) |
| Contact Email: | Ross.jago@plymouth.gov.uk |
| Your Reference: | BudR24/25 |
| Key Decision: | No |
| Confidentiality: | Part I - Official |

Purpose of Report

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board met across two days to consider whether the Cabinet has an effective plan for the implementation of the budget for the next financial year, focusing on organisational priorities.

The Committee focused the majority of their time on the greatest areas of risk facing the Council in Childrens Services, Adult Social Care and Health, Homelessness and the cost of living.

Recommendations and Reasons

That Cabinet consider the following recommendations made by the Budget Scrutiny Select Committee.

Recommendations to Cabinet

1. That the Section 151 Officer undertakes a comprehensive review of the working balance threshold using CIPFA best practice guidance and comparisons against the Council's statistical neighbours to determine if 5% remains appropriate given current risks;
2. Subject to the advice of the Section 151 Officer, Cabinet prepares a detailed plan to rebuild the reserves within two years to provide an adequate buffer against financial risks whilst implementing a clear strategy to reduce the Council's reliance upon use of one-off resources and reserves;
3. That Cabinet updates the comprehensive Medium Term Financial Strategy when multi-year funding settlements are agreed, and submits to scrutiny for consideration before the council take a final decision;

4. That all significant capital schemes have a detailed risk assessment of the impact of further interest rate changes on scheme viability before proceeding;
5. That Cabinet consider a Council Tax Discount scheme for Service Personnel who are deployed more than six months, in a similar fashion to Single Person Discount;
6. That 6 monthly updates are provided to the relevant scrutiny committee on delivery of planned savings within homelessness services, where £0.724m additional funding has been required;
7. That planned work to bring together asset management plans is considered at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board and that an asset register is provided for this purpose;
8. The Council should develop a comprehensive communications strategy to inform residents who are not digitally enabled about face-to-face services. This information, including service locations and operating hours, should be distributed through non-digital channels, with primary distribution through the annual Council Tax bill.
9. That Cabinet consider what additional funding may be available to commemorate Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan day;
10. The clear communication should be in place to ensure that residents are aware that direct cremations are available at the Park Crematorium;
11. That Cabinet review the effectiveness and sustainability of demand management approaches within Adult Social Care given the £12m of additional costs identified.
12. That the relevant Cabinet member is recommended to work with DELT shared services to ensure that internet connectivity is consistent across the PCC estate, particularly in libraries to enable residents to gain access to online services;
13. The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee undertakes a review of the work undertaken in the Dental Health Taskforce.
14. The committee welcomes the additional funding to process Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and that a regular update on progress against this backlog is provided to the Children Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel.
15. That Cabinet review the funding model for SEND transport to determine a sustainable long term solution, including consideration of independent travel training programmes where appropriate.
16. Write to the Government requesting a review of criteria in relation to home to school transport, such a review should consider whether receipt of a Motability vehicle or higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or PIP can be included in the Local Authority assessment of transport needs.
17. That Cabinet review the effectiveness and sustainability of demand management approaches within Children's Services given the £19m of additional costs identified and further accelerates the use of council assets in the approach to reduce demand on high cost placements;
18. That the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships establishes a robust monitoring framework to oversee the SEND capital programme ensuring clear accountability

for project milestones and progress. This should form regular reports to the Children Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee.

19. That the Leader to write to Government to request that notification of the Public Health Grant is received before the 31 December 2025 to enable adequate planning in the new year's budget.

Reason: The recommendations were made after careful consideration of the draft budget proposals and accompanying documentation.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Budget Scrutiny is a key part of the development of the 2025/26 budget and Cabinet are required to receive and respond to the recommendations of the Select Committee.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The Select Committee considered the themes within the Corporate Plan to ensure that proposals within the budget and business plans deliver against the council's vision.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Recommendations within the report impact on the 2025/26 budget and subject to the response from Cabinet could have impact on future years budgets within the scope of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Financial Risks

There are no financial risks as a direct result of this report.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

There are no environmental implications as a direct result of this report.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

N/A

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

| Ref. | Title of Appendix | Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) | | | | | | |
|------|-------------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i> | | | | | | |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| A | | | | | | | | |

Background papers:

**Add rows as required to box below*

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

| Title of any background paper(s) | Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) |
|----------------------------------|--|
|----------------------------------|--|

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i> | | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| | | | | | | | |

Sign off:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|-----|--|------------|--|----|--|------------|--|---------------|--|
| Fin | OW. 24.25. 033 | Leg | LS/0 0003 390/ 25/L B/5/2 /25 | Mon Off | | HR | | Asset s | | Strat Proc | |
| Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Northey (Service Director for Finance) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes 31/01/2025 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Scrutiny Chair approval: Councillor John Stephens (Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board) Date approved: 31/01/2025 | | | | | | | | | | | |

Cabinet



| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Date of meeting: | 10 February 2025 |
| Title of Report: | Cabinet Response - Budget Scrutiny Recommendations |
| Lead Member: | Councillor Mark Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance) |
| Lead Strategic Director: | David Northey, (Service Director for Finance) |
| Author: | David Northey, (Service Director for Finance) |
| Contact Email: | Ross.jago@plymouth.gov.uk |
| Your Reference: | CabR24/25 |
| Key Decision: | No |
| Confidentiality: | Part I - Official |

Purpose of Report

This report sets out the response to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Management Board following its consideration of the draft 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme.

Recommendations and Reasons

That the responses to the recommendations made by the Committee itemised in Appendix A to report are agreed.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Budget Scrutiny is a key part of the development of the 2025/26 budget and Cabinet are required to receive and respond to the recommendations of the Select Committee.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board considered the themes within the Corporate Plan to ensure that proposals within the budget and business plans deliver against the council's vision.

Implications for the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Financial and resources implications relating to the initial response to individual recommendations will be explored in detail as related proposals are brought forward.

Financial Risks

There are no financial risks as a direct result of this report.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

There are no environmental implications as a direct result of this report.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

N/A

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

| Ref. | Title of Appendix | Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box. | | | | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| A | Cabinet Response to Recommendations | | | | | | | |

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

| Title of any background paper(s) | Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box. | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| | | | | | | | |

Sign off:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|-----|--|------------|--|----|--|------------|--|---------------|--|
| Fin | OW. 24.25. 034 | Leg | LS/00 0033 90/25 /LB/5/ 2/25 | Mon Off | | HR | | Asset s | | Strat Proc | |
| Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Northey, (Service Director for Finance) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Date agreed: 31/01/2025 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cabinet Member approval: Cabinet Members | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Date approved: 03/02/2025 | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | Recommendation | Cabinet Response |
|----|--|--|
| 1. | That the Section 151 Officer undertakes a comprehensive review of the working balance threshold using CIPFA best practice guidance and comparisons against the Council's statistical neighbours to determine if 5% remains appropriate given current risks. | Agreed |
| 2. | Subject to the advice of the Section 151 Officer, Cabinet prepares a detailed plan to rebuild the reserves within two years to provide an adequate buffer against financial risks whilst implementing a clear strategy to reduce the Council's reliance upon use of one-off resources and reserves | Partially Agreed , subject to the findings from Recommendation 1. the required timescale might need to be over the period covered by the Medium Term Financial Plan rather than two years. |
| 3. | That Cabinet updates the comprehensive Medium Term Financial Strategy when multi-year funding settlements are agreed, and submits to scrutiny for consideration before the council take a final decision | Agreed. There is a commitment to refresh the Medium Term Financial Strategy on an on-going annual cycle. All future strategies will reflect multi-year settlement information. |
| 4. | That all significant capital schemes have a detailed risk assessment of the impact of further interest rate changes on scheme viability before proceeding | Agreed. As the Scrutiny Board are aware, there have been refinements to the approval and monitoring of all capital projects during 2024/25 These include improved business case requirements to include risk registers. Fluctuations in interest rates and their impact are considered, but this can be further strengthened to reflect this recommendation |
| 5. | That Cabinet consider a Council Tax Discount scheme for Service Personnel who are deployed more than six months, in a similar fashion to Single Person Discount | Agreed , Cabinet will consider but subject to further information from the Board on requested criteria. Any amendments will result in an additional financial burden and will be subject to public consultation |

| | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 6. | That 6 monthly updates are provided to the relevant scrutiny committee on delivery of planned savings within homelessness services, where £0.724m additional funding has been required | Agreed - It's important to note that the recent increase in the homelessness budget is directly attributable to additional grant support provided by the new Labour government. This funding is specifically allocated to help address the impact of the national housing crisis within our community. |
| 7. | That planned work to bring together asset management plans is considered at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board and that an asset register is provided for this purpose | Agreed. |
| 8. | The Council should develop a comprehensive communications strategy to inform residents who are not digitally enabled about face-to-face services. This information, including service locations and operating hours, should be distributed through non-digital channels, with primary distribution through the annual Council Tax bill. | Partially agreed – We will prioritise the support for residents who are unable to access online services based on clear eligibility criteria. We will continue to target communications to those residents are not digitally enabled, however as our offer is not universal this information will not be included in Council Tax bills. |
| 9. | That Cabinet consider what additional funding may be available to commemorate Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan day, | Agreed. |
| 10. | That clear communication should be in place to ensure that residents are aware that direct cremations are available at the Park Crematorium. | Agreed. |
| 11. | That Cabinet review the effectiveness and sustainability of demand management approaches within Adult Social Care given the £12m of additional costs identified. | Agreed. |
| 12. | That the relevant Cabinet member is recommended to work with DELT shared services to ensure that internet connectivity is consistent across the PCC estate, particularly in libraries to enable residents to gain access to online services. | Agreed. This work is underway, and a report will be shared with the relevant Cabinet member. |

| | | |
|-----|--|--|
| | | |
| 13. | The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee undertakes a review of the work undertaken in the Dental Health Taskforce. | Agreed Cabinet is aware that the Scrutiny Function may request items for review. The Cabinet member will provide a report on progress when invited to do so, although it must be understood that the council is not responsible for dental provision in the city. |
| 14. | The committee welcomes the additional funding to process Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and that a regular update on progress against this backlog is provided to the Children Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel. | Agreed. |
| 15. | That Cabinet review the funding model for SEND transport to determine a sustainable long term solution, including consideration of independent travel training programmes where appropriate. | Agreed. The council has already developed independent travel training programmes, and the relevant Cabinet member will provide a report on this issue to the relevant panel when requested. |
| 16. | Write to the Government requesting a review of criteria in relation to home to school transport, such a review should consider whether receipt of a Motability vehicle or higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independent Payments (PIP) can be included in the Local Authority assessment of transport needs. | Agreed. |
| 17. | That Cabinet review the effectiveness and sustainability of demand management approaches within Children's Services given the £19m of additional costs identified and further accelerates the use of council assets in the approach to reduce demand on high cost placements. | Agreed. |
| 18. | That the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships establishes a robust monitoring framework to oversee the SEND capital programme ensuring clear accountability for project milestones and progress. This should form regular reports to the Children Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee. | Agreed. |

| | | |
|-----|--|--|
| | | |
| 19. | That the Leader to write to Government to request that notification of the Public Health Grant is received before the 31 December 2025 to enable adequate planning in the new year's budget. | Agreed, subject to public health funding being not being included in the settlement. The Government have announced their intention to reform local authority funding ahead of the 2026/27 Settlement and the Cabinet will review this recommendation again if Public Health funding is not included in any changes. |

Cabinet



| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Date of meeting: | 10 February 2025 |
| Title of Report: | Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry 2025-2026 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme |
| Lead Member: | Councillor Mark Coker (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport) |
| Lead Strategic Director: | Karime Hassan (Interim Strategic Director for Growth) |
| Author: | Adrian Trim – Lead Officer Tamar Crossings |
| Contact Email: | Adrian.Trim@plymouth.gov.uk |
| Your Reference: | |
| Key Decision: | No |
| Confidentiality: | Part I - Official |

Purpose of Report

The Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry have historically been operated together as a single undertaking on a 'user-pays' principle funded almost entirely from toll income. The undertaking maintains a contemporary financial model that incorporates income forecasts based on traffic levels. Income at the two crossings had been reduced by the effect of Covid-19 and traffic levels have still not recovered to pre pandemic levels and are now operating at circa 90% of that previously.

This report sets out for consideration and approval, the proposed revenue estimates (budget) for Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council Cabinet and Full Council for 2025/26 and indicative figures for the subsequent three years 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29, together with the proposed capital programme.

The assumptions used to calculate the revenue estimates and proposed capital programme are based on information available to officers at the time of report preparation. However, it is hoped that the proposed toll revision requested in June 2024, if agreed, will stabilise finances over the next 4 year period, to those seen in more recent years.

The full report, with an appendices link, agreed by the Joint Committee on the 6 December 2024, is attached for reference.

Recommendations and Reasons

That Cabinet recommends to Council:

1. That the 2025/26 revenue estimates and capital programme and the draft 2025-26 Business plan, as set out in the appendices to the JC Report, be approved; and
2. The longer-term forecast to 2028/29 is noted.

Reasons

Without an approved budget, agreed by the parent authorities, PCC and CC, bridge and ferry operations would be unable to operate. An agreed, approved budget is a requirement of the existing governance arrangements of the parent authorities.

Alternative options considered and rejected

1. Not to approve the Budget as presented; rejected on the basis that Bridge and Ferry operations need to provide safe crossings 7/365, connecting communities, supporting the local and national economy and providing access to healthcare and leisure.
2. The do-nothing option was also rejected as it would result in the parent authorities not delivering safe crossings or meeting their responsibilities regarding a duty of care.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The Tamar Bridge & Torpoint Ferry links are key gateways to the City and provide opportunities for investment, jobs and growth particularly in the wider context of Plymouth as the regional economic centre.

Providing a safe well-maintained road network contribute to the economic well-being of the City, supporting the Council’s Growth priority.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

There are no direct implications to the MTFP or direct resource implications other than Service Director oversight of crossing management and operational delivery.

Financial Risks

The recommendations address the financial, safety and operational requirements thus reducing associated risk to the parent authorities.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

Continued service delivery will provide reliable journey times and minimises the potential for congestion or longer diverted journeys and related pollution.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council’s duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

Risk Management – This report addresses the requirement to continue with BAU for these important crossings.

Health and Safety – Key Performance Indicators within the Strategic Plan and associated Annual Plans are designed to drive improvement regarding health and safety for staff and users of the crossings.

There are no child poverty or community safety implications.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

| Ref. | Title of Appendix | Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) |
|------|-------------------|--|
| | | <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i> |

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Briefing report title Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry 2025/26 Revenue and Capital Programme | | | | | | | |
| B | TBTFJC Report - December 6 2024 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme | | | | | | | |
| C | Draft Minutes TBTFJC Meeting, 6 December 2024 | | | | | | | |

Background papers:

**Add rows as required to box below*

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

| Title of any background paper(s) | Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

Sign off:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----|----------------------------------|------------|--|----|--|------------|--|---------------|--|
| Fin | DJN. 24.25. 151 | Leg | LS/29 60(38)JP/03 0225 | Mon Off | | HR | | Asset s | | Strat Proc | |
| Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Philip Robinson (Service Director for Street Services) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Date agreed: 31/01/2025 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Mark Coker (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport). | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Date approved: 31/01/2025 | | | | | | | | | | | |

Appendix A

Briefing Report -

Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme

Introduction

- 1.1 The Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry are operated, maintained and improved jointly by Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council on a 'user pays' principle, being funded by toll income using powers derived from the Tamar Bridge Act. The finances of the joint undertaking are effectively ring-fenced by the Act, and it is operated in normal times as a self-financing business.
- 1.2 The existing governance requires that both parent authorities agree an annual Budget to facilitate the undertakings as part of the operational delivery remit. As a part of the governance process the Cabinet are required to recommend the report to Full Council for their approval.
- 1.3 The budget for 2025/26 will meet the requirements of the Councils, in that it is balanced and affordable, even though traffic levels have remained below pre-Covid levels and are currently running at approximately 90% at both crossings, which is line with the 90% level incorporated in the financial model.
- 1.4 Appendices 1- 4 of the TBTF JC Report, 2025/26 contain Revenue and Capital Programme and the Annual Business Plan.

2. Future Finance Forecast

- 2.1 Action has been taken in terms of a proposed 15% toll revision, to ensure the identified deficit in last year's TBTF report to the Cabinet January 2024 has been addressed. Whilst the issue is currently with the Secretary of State for Transport, for a decision, it is intended to implement the increase at earliest opportunity, should, as expected, the decision be approved. The SoS is required to inform the Councils of the decision before the end of March 2025, although it is hoped the decision will be communicated much sooner than that. The table below provides a forecast of the reserve balance assuming the toll revision is granted.

| | 2024/25 | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Forecast reserve balance at 31st March | (£0.977m) | (£1.573m) | (£1.312m) | (£1.038m) | (£1.420m) |

- 2.2 The Tamar Bridge Act 1957 sets out the default process to be followed if deficits arise, namely that the parent authorities, Cornwall Council and Plymouth City Council cover that deficit for possible subsequent recovery at some later stage when the undertaking returns to a surplus position.

- 2.3 A 15% toll increase was proposed by the TBTF JC in December 2023 and both Councils ratified the proposal to progress the request to the SoS for Transport, if agreed by the SoS it will be implemented at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.4 The Joint Chairmen of TBTFJC and Portfolio Holders of both authorities continued to lobby government to;
- a) Have the ability to apply RPI locally, which will require Primary Legislation and is currently being progressed with local MPs.
 - b) Seek a long-term package of financial support for Tamar Bridge, although this request has been without success to date.
- 2.5 The introduction of Tamar 2050, in February 2024 to provide a more robust agenda for the future aspirations regarding the crossings may provide more traction regarding Government support in the future.
- 2.6 TBTF Joint Committee Resolutions can be found in the draft minutes of the meeting on 6 December 2024 which are attached at Appendix C.

Appendix B

| | | |
|---|---|------------------------|
| Report to: | Tamar Bridge & Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee | |
| Date: | 6 December 2024 | |
| Title: | 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme | |
| Portfolio Area: | Cornwall Council: Transport Plymouth City Council: Transport | |
| Divisions Affected: | All | |
| Local Member(s) briefed: | NA | |
| Relevant Scrutiny Committee: NA | | |
| Authors, Roles and Contact Details: | <p>Vicky Fraser, Service Director Connectivity & Environment Vicky.Fraser@cornwall.gov.uk</p> <p>Philip Robinson, Service Director for Street Services, Plymouth City Council Philip.robinson@plymouth.gov.uk</p> <p>Andrew Vallance, Governance and Finance Manager andrew.vallance@tamarcrossings.org.uk</p> <p>Julia Harvey, Service Accountant Julia.1.Harvey@cornwall.gov.uk</p> | |
| Approval and clearance obtained: | | Y / N |
| Date next steps can be taken | | 6 December 2024 |
| For Cabinet and delegated executive decisions only | | |
| Key decision? (≥£500k in value or significant effect on communities in two or more electoral divisions) | | N |
| Published in advance on Cabinet Work Programme? | | N |
| Urgency Procedure(s) used if 'N' to Work Programme | | N |

Recommendations to the Councils of the Parent Authorities via the Cabinet of the Parent Authorities:

1. That the 2025/26 revenue budget and capital programme and the draft 2025/26 business plan, as set out in appendices 1-4 to this report, be approved; and
2. The longer-term forecast to 2028/29 is noted.

Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out for consideration and approval, the proposed revenue budget for the Joint Committee for 2025/26 and indicative figures for the subsequent three years 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29, together with the proposed capital programme.
- 1.2 The forecast reserve position on 31 March 2025 is £0.977m. Indicatively, future years shows that the reserve position increases to £1.573m by the end of 2025/26, then decreases annually before it starts to increase in 2028/29 to £1.420m.

| | 2024/25 | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Reserve balance on 31st March | (£0.977m) | (£1.573m) | (£1.312m) | (£1.038m) | (£1.420m) |

2 Purpose of Report and key information

- 2.1 The Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferries (TBTF) are operated, maintained, and improved jointly by Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council on a 'user pays' principle, being funded by toll income using powers derived from the Tamar Bridge Acts.
- 2.2 In developing the budgets for 2025/26 to 2028/29 set out within appendix 1, the following inflationary and interest assumptions have been used:
- 2.3

| Rates | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Inflation CPI | 2.60% | 2.30% | 2.10% | 2.10% |
| Inflation RPI | 3.50% | 3.30% | 3.10% | 2.90% |
| Pay Inflation | 3.00% | 2.00% | 2.00% | 2.00% |
| Interest (Receivable) | 3.00% | 2.40% | 2.20% | 2.00% |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Interest (Payable) existing borrowing | 4.65% | 4.65% | 4.65% | 4.65% |
| Interest (Payable) new borrowing | 5.99% | 4.99% | 4.79% | 4.69% |

- 2.4 The second interest rate payable line above reflects any new capital loans agreed. It should be noted that the rate will only be fixed when loans are taken out and future rates are subject to movement in the general market. Loans that predate April 2019 will continue to be calculated using Cornwall's consolidated rate of interest at the time the loan was entered into.
- 2.5 The proposed budget is set out in Appendix 1. The variations between the latest 2024/25 forecast and the proposed 2025/26 budget are listed on page 5 of Appendix 1. The 2026/27 to 2028/29 estimates are only indicative.
- 2.4.1 The **Corporate** revenue budget (which includes income and corporate expenditure headings) currently shows a favourable movement of £2.492m on overall income and an adverse movement of £0.057m on expenditure. The significant movements from the previous year are:
- Full year impact of the increase in tolls (assumed approval is received for implementation in February 2025) of £2.446m.
 - An increase in the volume of tags being purchased of £0.033m, related to an increase in Tag users and the more active approach to replacing lost or damaged tags.
 - Bank charges has seen an increase of £0.030m arising from additional card processing charges related to the increase in the tolls.
- 2.4.2 The **Bridge's** revenue budget makes provision for the ongoing maintenance and operations of the bridge and its infrastructure in line with current engineering practices. The movement from the previous year shows an adverse movement of £0.152m. The main changes from the previous year are:
- Staffing including agency is showing an increase of £0.171m due to forecast national pay awards and NI rate increases.
 - R&M Bridge and Infrastructure has decreased by £0.149m, reflecting planned maintenance tasks for the year.
 - Bridge and gantry inspections has been increased by £0.064m to reflect the newly procured contract cost.

- Toll cash handling and collection is showing an increase of £0.055m due to inflation rises.
- The other budget lines have had inflationary increases applied.

2.4.3 The **Ferry's** revenue budget makes provision for the ongoing maintenance and operation of the ferries and their associated infrastructure in line with current engineering practices. The movement from the previous year shows an increase in costs of £0.348m. The main changes from the previous year are:

- Staffing including agency staff is showing an increase of £0.290m due to the forecast national pay award and NI rate increases.
- Marine oil has increased by £0.016m as provision for movement in market prices.
- R&M Boat Maintenance increased by £0.020m for inflationary increases.
- The other budget lines have had inflationary increases applied.

2.4.4 The **Learning Centre** costs have increased by £0.058m, mainly due to an addition to the budget of £0.050m for the cyclical update and replacement of public displays.

2.4.5 Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) and Interest repayments have been increased by £0.189m and £0.352m respectively, to reflect the current capital programme and indicative future scheme expenditure for 2025/26 as detailed below.

2.6 The proposed Capital Programme is shown in Appendix 2. Officers have undertaken work to assess the current and future capital programme and the revised estimated costs for 2025/26 is £12.310m.

2.6.1 The details of this are as follows:

- Bridge structural fire protection upgrade £3.350m moved from the current financial year
- Ferry decarbonisation £2.800m (if grant funding can be secured, the funding for this will be updated and less borrowing will be required)
- Main Cable remedial works brought back into the programme (from 2023/24) £1.824m
- Ferry Refit final year of three-year programme £1.800m
- Ferry Traffic Control Systems £0.950m moved from the current financial year
- Bridge protective coating second year £0.700m

- Bridge Access improvement works £0.231m brought back into the programme from 2023/24.
- Ferry Gantry Tower Replacement £0.225m
- Torpoint Office and Workshop Refurbishment £0.200m (this represents additional expenditure compared to the existing programme)
- Rocker/Pendle remedial works £0.128m
- Supplementary Cable Works £0.102m

2.5.2 One additional scheme has also been added to the programme of work:

- Ferry Refit cycle from 2028/2031, the first year being 2028/29 at an addition of £1.800m

2.6 **Reserves** – the reserve position on 31st March 2025 (Appendix 3) is forecasted to be £0.977m. The forecast for 2025/26 end of year reserve position then increases to £1.573m however, from 2026/27 the reserve level reduces for two years and then increases again in 2028/29 to a forecast balance of £1.420m. The increase in 2028/29 is due to the assumption that this will be the first year RPI could be added to tolls, subject to achieving the necessary change to legislation.

2.7 The joint Committee receives a quarterly update on its financial position to provide assurance that the finances of the undertaking are being managed appropriately and that any significant issues are highlighted, and necessary action is taken to address them. This quarter's update, presented to the 6 December 2024 meeting also provides for a fully revised budget position.

2.8 The Terms of Reference for the Undertaking requires that an Annual Business Plan accompanies the budgets for approval by Full Councils. The 2025/26 Draft Business Plan attached as Appendix 4, continues the approach of providing a single year plan to reflect the ongoing work on longer term strategies following receipt of reports following the consultant's review and the development of Tamar 2050.

3 Benefits for Customers/Residents

3.1 Appropriate management of finances and budget monitoring ensures that appropriate resources is available for the operation, maintenance and improvement of the crossings which form key elements of the local transport network which is essential to the sustainable economic and social development of the region for the benefit of residents.

4 Relevant Previous Decisions

4.1 Approved budget for 2024/25 at Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee of 12 January 2024 (TBTF/53)

<https://democracy.cornwall.gov.uk/documents/s174577/24%202025%20Revenue%20Budget%20and%20Capital%20Programme%20Setting.pdf>

On recommendation of Cornwall Council Cabinet meeting of 7 February 2024 (CAB/336)
<https://democracy.cornwall.gov.uk/documents/s175320/Tamar%20Bridge%20Torpoint%20Ferry%20%20Future%20Financing%20and%20202425%20Revenue%20Budget%20and%20Capital%20Programme%20-%20.pdf>

Approved budget for 2024/25 at Cornwall Council meeting of 20 February 2024 (CC/469)
<https://democracy.cornwall.gov.uk/documents/s175592/TBTF%20Future%20Financing%20and%202024%202025%20Revenue%20Budget%20and%20Capital%20Programme.pdf>

4.2 On recommendation of Plymouth City Council Cabinet meeting of 12 February 2024

<https://democracy.plymouth.gov.uk/documents/s144248/TBTF%20PCC%20Cab%20Report%20Revenue%20Capital%20Financing%20Jan24.pdf>

4.3 Approved budget for 2024/25 at City Council meeting of 8 March 2024

<https://democracy.plymouth.gov.uk/documents/s144764/TBTF%20PCC%20FC%20Report%20Revenue%20Capital%20Financing%20Mar24%20V3%20002.pdf>

5 Consultation and Engagement

5.1 Not applicable

6 Financial Implications of the proposed course of action/decision

6.1 Financial implications are detailed within Section 2 of this report. Whilst this report only seeks approval of the 2025/26 revenue budget and capital programme, the forecast over the 4 year period includes assumptions and best estimates at the time of preparation. The forecast assumes that tolls will increase from February 2025, which relies on central Government approval.

6.2 There continues to be a risk that central Government do not agree the toll revision and the cash toll (and corresponding Tag toll) cannot be increased from February 2025. If this occurs then the Joint Committee will need to consider other levers available to it which could be implemented such that the overall budgeted income level is met or alternative budget proposals are brought forward in year, such that the overall surplus or deficit does not result in a negative reserve balance at the end of the financial year.

7 Legal/Governance Implications of the proposed course of action/decision

7.1 The Joint Committee is being asked to make recommendations to the Full Councils of both parent authorities via the Cabinets of both parent authorities. Cornwall Council's Cabinet will consider this at its meeting on 12 February 2025 and Cornwall Council's Full Council will consider this at its meeting on 25 February 2025. Plymouth City Council's Cabinet will consider this at its meeting on 10 February 2025 and Plymouth City Council's Full Council will consider this at its meeting on 24 February 2025.

8 Risk Implications of the proposed course of action/decision

8.1 There are no implications associated with this report.

9 Cornwall Development and Decision Wheel

9.1 Not applicable

10 Options available

10.1 To recommend to the Full Council of each Parent Authority via the Cabinet of each Parent Authority that it approves the proposed revenue estimate for 2025/26, capital programme and draft business plan as set out in Appendices 1 – 4. This is the preferred option for the reasons set out in this report.

10.2 To not recommend to the Full Council of each Parent Authority via the Cabinet of each Parent Authority that it approves the proposed revenue budget for 2025/26, capital programme and draft business plan as set out in Appendices 1 – 4. This is not the preferred option as a revenue budget, capital programme and business plan must be set.

11 Supporting Information (Appendices)

Appendix 1: Revenue Estimates for 2025/26 through to 2028/29

Appendix 2: Capital Programme 2025/26 to 2028/29

Appendix 3: Statement of Estimated Reserves 2025/26 to 2028/29

Appendix 4: Annual Business Plan 2025/26

12 Background Papers

12.1 None

13 Approval and clearance**All reports:**

| Final report sign offs | This report has been cleared by (or mark not required if appropriate) | Date |
|--|--|-------------|
| Governance/Legal (Required for all reports) | Lia Musto-Shinton | 27.11.2024 |
| Finance (Required for all reports) | Geraldine Baker | 27/11/2024 |
| Cornwall Development and Decision Wheel (where required) | | |
| Service Director (Required for all reports) | Vicky Fraser | 27.11.2024 |
| Strategic Director (If required) | Phil Mason | 28.11.2024 |

Draft reports process checklist for Cabinet/individual decisions report:

Complete the checklist below while you are drafting your Cabinet or individual decision report. It will be removed before publication.

| Process checklist | Completed |
|---|------------------|
| Communications team informed | Yes/No |
| Portfolio Holder briefed | Yes/No |
| Strategic Director briefed | Yes/No |
| Service Director sign off | Yes/No |
| Data protection issues considered | Yes/No |
| If exempt information, public (part 1) report also drafted. (Cabinet/Scrutiny) | Yes/No |
| If not on Cabinet Work Programme, Scrutiny offered the opportunity to consider the report | Yes/No |

Page 24

For Appendix 1,2,3,4 please open TBTF Joint Committee Public Pack (below) and refer to the pages noted against each Appendix.

Appendix 1 Revenue Estimates for 2025 through to 2028/29 Page 51 - 56

Appendix 2 Pages Capital Programme 57 – 58

Appendix 3 Statement of Estimated Reserves Pages 59 – 60

Appendix 4 Annual Business Plan - Pages 61 - 75

[https://democracy.cornwall.gov.uk/documents/g13452/Public reports pack 06th-Dec-2024 10.00 Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee.pdf?T=10](https://democracy.cornwall.gov.uk/documents/g13452/Public%20reports%20pack%2006th-Dec-2024%2010.00%20Tamar%20Bridge%20and%20Torpoint%20Ferry%20Joint%20Committee.pdf?T=10)

Appendix C

CORNWALL COUNCIL

TAMAR BRIDGE AND TORPOINT FERRY JOINT COMMITTEE

DRAFT MINUTES of a Meeting of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee held in the Warspite Room, Plymouth City Council, Armada Way, Plymouth, PL1 3AA on Friday 6 December 2024 commencing at 10.00 am.

Present:- Councillors: Worth (Co-Chair) and Dingle (Co-Chair)
Coker, Freeman, Hendy, Long, Tivnan, Toms and Wood.

Also in attendance:- Councillors: (None).
Also in attendance (virtual):- Councillors: Donnithorne
Apologies for absence:- Councillors: (None).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda No. 2)

TBTF/77 There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2024

(Agenda No. 3)

TBTF/78 It was moved by Councillor Tivnan, seconded by Councillor Toms, and

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee held on 13 September 2024 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman, subject to the addition of reference to Member concerns surrounding potential insurance issues relating to an injured person being taken to Derriford Hospital by a member of Tamar Crossings staff in a private vehicle.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

(Agenda No. 4)

TBTF/79 There were no questions from the public.

GENERAL MANAGER'S QUARTERLY REPORT

(Agenda No. 5)

TBTF/80 The Committee considered the General Manager's Quarterly Report (previously circulated) presented by the General Manager.

In response to comments and questions from Joint Committee Members, officers confirmed that:-

1. The proposed refurbishment of ferry offices was appropriate to be considered as a capital expenditure as it represented considerable works and was separate to general small scale maintenance, with similar work not having taken place for 25 years.
2. A slight decrease in traffic paying with cash and a slight increase in traffic paying by tag had led to a marginally lower toll yield per vehicle this year when compared to the previous year.
3. Information on journey times utilising the new Cloud based sensor information would be made available to Members and other local stakeholders, potentially through an online resource. The recent improvements in journey times were attributed to improvements in contactless payment speeds rather than to a seasonal changes in payment methods.
4. Clarification and further investigation was sought by Members relating to the exact nature of the of the decision in 1968 to route the A38 over the Tamar Bridge, a response to which was to be provided in writing. Officers informed Members that Tamar Crossings and the two Parent Authorities were not currently aware of any pertinent information relating to this and that subsequent to 1968, the Tamar Bridge Act 1979 and the Tamar Bridge Act 1998 had been passed.
5. Tamar Crossings had a close working relationship with National Highways, with planned works to be conducted by the latter on the Saltash Tunnel being optimised to limit any potential impact on the crossings. National Highways had provided updates to the Peninsula Transport Board and local Community Area Partnerships, although Members expressed concern that some local stakeholders had not been made aware of relevant information.
6. The directing of traffic onto ferries by Tamar Crossings staff was a complex task, with the need to load different classes of vehicles onto different parts of the ferry. The use of high-visibility gloves which staff had previously used would be investigated and potentially reintroduced, especially in low-light conditions.
7. Members expressed their gratitude to the General Manager for his 25 years of service at Tamar Crossings.

It was proposed by Councillor Tivnan, seconded by Councillor Freeman

RESOLVED that:-

1. That an updated report be brought to the next meeting.

2024/25 BUDGET MONITORING

(Agenda No. 6)

TBTF/81 The Committee considered the 2024/25 Budget Monitoring report (previously circulated) presented by the Service Accountant.

It was confirmed by officers that the any favourable variances appearing in this report were in-line with existing budget modelling.

It was also confirmed by officers that the cost of the upcoming increase in employer National Insurance payments will appear in future budget reports after its introduction on 1 April 2025.

The report was noted.

2025/26 REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 7)

TBTF/82 The Committee considered the 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme (previously circulated) presented by the Service Accountant.

In response to comments and questions from Joint Committee Members, officers confirmed that:-

1. The figures in the report assumed that the proposed toll increase would come into effect in February 2025, and if this was not the case the figures would need to be revised.
2. Ordinarily financial reserves of less than £2 million would trigger consideration of an additional toll increase, with the financial reserve forecast to be at £977,000 as of 31 March 2025 officers emphasised the fragility of Tamar Crossings financial position.
3. Members expressed gratitude to the Service Accountant for their ongoing work for the Joint Committee and their contribution to the recent Public Inquiry.
4. Members sought and received assurance that the figures in the report surrounding the salaries and wages of Tamar Crossings staff was accurate, to which a more detailed written response was to be given. Officers emphasised that there were no staff currently at Tamar Crossings who were being paid the National Living Wage and figures in the reports assumed no staff vacancies throughout the year, which was currently not the case.
5. Any recent changes in employer National Insurance payments had been taken into account by the report.

It was proposed by Councillor Dingle, seconded by Councillor Hendy and

RESOLVED that:-

1. That the 2025/26 revenue budget and capital programme and the draft 2025/26 business plan, as set out in appendices 1-4 to this report, be approved.

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR TAMAR 2050 REPORT

(Agenda No. 8)

TBTF/83 The Committee considered the Programme Director Tamar 2050 Report (previously circulated) presented by the Programme Director for Tamar 2050.

During the course of the debate a number of issues were raised, including:-

1. Members expressed concern that more Community Area Partnerships in the locale of the Tamar crossings should be involved in the community engagement around Tamar 2050 Project, including those in both Devon and Cornwall.
2. Members continued to want a regular update on progress surrounding the Tamar 2050 Project, it was considered that the focus in future reports to Joint Committee meetings should be on progress against targets, as opposed to restating already considered information.
3. Members drew attention to the difficulties surrounding the creation of the Torpoint Neighbourhood Development Plan. Some proposed construction works on the site of the former police station in Torpoint were discussed in terms of impact upon the local environment, the benefit to residents and the local community and the fact that there was an open public consultation in relation to this. It was considered very unlikely by Members to impact the operation of the Torpoint Ferry.
4. Tamar Crossings officers were aware of the Red Weather Warning issued by the Met Office, which had the potential to impact bridge and ferry services. Updates on the situation would be issued on the Tamar Crossings website and social media. Officers highlighted that although they did not have direct control over what was broadcast on local radio, they were aware that local radio monitored the Tamar Crossings website, social media and press releases to provide their own updates.

It was proposed by Councillor Worth, seconded by Councillor Wood and

RESOLVED that:-

1. That an updated report be brought to the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 11.37 am.

Cabinet



| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Date of meeting: | 10 February 2025 |
| Title of Report: | Children's Services Update |
| Lead Member: | Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications) |
| Lead Strategic Director: | David Haley (Director for Childrens Services) |
| Author: | Vivien Lines, Children's Transformation Team |
| Contact Email: | Vivien.lines@plymouth.gov.uk |
| Your Reference: | |
| Key Decision: | No |
| Confidentiality: | Part I - Official |

Purpose of Report

This report provides the sixth monthly update on and response to the Quarter 1 Financial Monitoring Cabinet Report presented in August 2024. The Quarter 1 Monitoring Report identified a budget variation of £4.692m forecast overspend related to placement costs of children in Plymouth's care. A first children's services update was provided to September Cabinet as recommended in the Quarter 1 monitoring report and this report provides a further update and response to that position.

Recommendations

For Cabinet to note the report.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Keeping children, adults and communities in Plymouth safe.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

The report relates to MTFP commitments for the cost of care for children in our care.

Financial Risks

There are significant financial risks to the Council from pressures in this area as set out in the paper.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

None

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council’s duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

The paper addresses risks to the organisation.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

| Ref. | Title of Appendix | Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) | | | | | | |
|------|-------------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| A | Briefing report | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |

Background papers:

**Add rows as required to box below*

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

| Title of any background paper(s) | Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

Sign off:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|----------------------|--|--|------------|--|----|--|------------|--|---------------|--|
| Fin | OW. 24.25. 016 | | | Mon Off | LS/0 0003 390/ 26/L B/05/ 02/2 5 | HR | | Asset s | | Strat Proc | |
|-----|----------------------|--|--|------------|--|----|--|------------|--|---------------|--|

Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Haley (Director for Children’s Services)

Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes

Date agreed: 03/02/2025

Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Care, Culture and Communications

05/02/2025

I. Background and context

- I.1 The approved budget for placements for children in care in 2024/25 is £36.725m and at period 9 (December) the annual forecast spend is £42.575m, representing a forecast overspend of £5.850m. This has been a deteriorating position month on month this financial year as the number of children in care placed in residential settings has been increasing due to a shortage of foster placements for children. The table below shows where children in care are living compared to our projections when budget setting was completed and the costs of these placements. The pressure is both a cost and volume pressure.

| Type of Placement | Estimated Numbers Sept 23 | Existing Budget £m | Month 8 Forecast £m | Actual Numbers Month 9 | Month 9 Forecast £m | Variance to Month 8 £m | Variance to Budget £m |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| External Residential | 50 | 15.248 | 18.650 | 64 | 19.034 | 0.384 | 3.786 |
| Unregistered | 6 | 3.387 | 6.043 | 4 | 5.933 | -0.110 | 2.546 |
| External Fostering | 158 | 9.251 | 8.880 | 154 | 8.88 | 0.000 | -0.371 |
| In-House Foster Care | 126 | 2.855 | 2.855 | 150 | 2.855 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| In-House Connected Carers | 42 | 0.952 | 0.952 | 49 | 0.952 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| External Supported Living | 41 | 3.758 | 3.600 | 46 | 3.648 | 0.048 | -0.110 |
| Other Placement Settings - Children in Care | 65 | 1.274 | 1.274 | 55 | 1.274 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| TOTAL CHILDREN IN CARE | 488 | 36.725 | 42.255 | 522 | 42.575 | 0.321 | 5.850 |

- I.2 522 children were in the care of the Local Authority at the end of December, an overall downward trend in numbers over the previous six months (from 528 in November). Ten children came into care during December and 13 left care. Of the children coming into care, seven were planned as a result of ongoing assessment and concerns about the children and three were unplanned, arising from significant child protection incidents leading to the children needing safeguarding.
- I.3 The children's fostering and residential markets remain extremely challenging with a lack of fostering sufficiency driving some children into very high-cost residential placements. The evolving nature of children's needs and predicting the specific timing and requirements for their placement in our care remains a challenge. The expansion of our inhouse Foster for Plymouth service and the development of in-house residential provision for children are key developments as part of our Family Homes for Plymouth Children Transformation Plan to support more children to live in families close to Plymouth.
- I.4 There has been an increase in the number of children placed with connected carers and an increase in the number of children placed with our Foster for Plymouth carers this year. However, as a result of a national shortage of foster carers there has been an increase in the number of children placed in residential children's homes from 50 in September 2023 when budget setting was undertaken, to 64 at the end of December 2024. Whilst we have a successful block contract with

a local provider, providing homes in Plymouth for 16 children, 44 children in care are in children's homes at a distance from Plymouth. In addition, the average weekly cost of a child in a residential placement has risen to £7,523 per week from £6,906 per week in September 2023.

- 1.5 Because of the overall shortage of fostering and residential placements, a small number of children have required high-cost unregulated placements in settings not registered with Ofsted.
- 1.6 We continue to experience challenges finding fostering placements for children when they first come into care as well as for those children in residential settings who are identified as being ready to move onto a family setting and where family finding is actively progressing. As a result, children are placed in high-cost residential placements whilst we continue to search for foster families and because of a lack of supply of residential placements, some children are placed in unregistered arrangements as suitable residential placements cannot be identified.
- 1.7 At the end of December, as a result of focused management attention, the number of cared for young people in unregistered arrangements had reduced to two and both of these children are in provision that is registered with CQC. Unregistered Placements can cost on average £12,000-£16,000 per child a week, although in some cases have cost over £29k per child p/week. Our current forecast spend for unregistered placements is £5.933m a reduction of £110k from the previous month due to effective management action to identify regulated settings for some children.
- 1.8 During December, the number of children in residential settings increased to 64 (from 54 in July 2024) and a small group moved to higher cost placements during the month due to an increase in their needs, leading to an increase in the forecast position from £4.454m to £5.530 (a deterioration of £1.076m).

2. Learning from Quality Assurance

- 2.1 Quality assurance audits evidence that our social work practice is improving, assessments are more robust and social workers and team managers are making better and more confident decisions for children at risk of significant harm in a timelier way.
- 2.2 A recent review of children who recently experienced placement breakdown and moves into higher cost placements identified that foster carers were well supported and good efforts are being made to prevent placement disruptions for children, but some of our foster carers are finding the needs of some children too challenging. Our first Mockingbird Constellation is proving effective in providing a model of support for a group of foster carers. None of the children who had experienced a placement disruption in this review were placed in the Mockingbird constellation. Further information about the development of the Mockingbird model in Plymouth is set out below.
- 2.3 The focus continues to be on ensuring that families are provided with the right help when difficulties first emerge, to intervene in a timely and effective way when problems become more complex and to ensure the right placement, stable care and active care planning for children and young people when they do need to be in our care.

3. The Family Homes for Plymouth Children Transformation Programme

- 3.1 Our programme of work to reduce spend in this area and ensure children in care have a home that meets their needs and that wherever possible children grow up in families local to Plymouth is called 'Family Homes for Plymouth Children.' It has several elements:

Family Homes for Plymouth Children



3.2 Key planned outcomes of the programme include;

- Improve practice to keep more children at home and utilise family options when children do need alternative care, including further developing the use of family led decision making models to build family capacity so that children can remain cared for within their friends and family network.
- Grow the local independent sector market to increase local supply of both residential and foster care in line with our Sufficiency Strategy and reduce cost.
- Strengthen our brokerage function so that we maximise our capacity to identify the right placement at the right price for all children from when they first come into care.
- Use an evidence-based approach to identify children ready to move on from residential settings and to 'STEP' children from residential settings to foster placements in a timely, managed and well supported way.
- Recruit more foster carers for our in-house fostering service, 'Foster for Plymouth' and support more of our carers to be able to look after children with more complex needs or challenging behaviours.
- Support children who have been in care for some time to be reunified with their birth families when it is identified that there have been significant changes in the family.
- PCC becoming a direct provider of residential care for children and young people.
- Ensure we are get value for money from our placement spend, including maximising contributions from partners for eligible children with more complex needs.
- Improve support for kinship and Special Guardianship carers so that more children can leave care successfully through these routes.

Market development

3.3 To improve the range of high-quality residential placements and foster care closer to Plymouth we have:

- Strengthened how we work with fostering and residential providers in the region and elsewhere, in line with the objectives set out in our Sufficiency Strategy to support them to develop more provision in Plymouth.
- Improved our brokerage capacity so that we maximise available placements local to Plymouth for our looked after children.

3.4 Our Sufficiency Strategy has been updated for publication to the market setting out an updated needs analysis of the children we need care for and specific priorities where we would encourage the independent sector to develop more local provision. This currently includes provision for children with more complex emotional and behavioural needs and provision for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. A dedicated Commissioning Lead has identified tactical opportunities for local providers to develop more provision in line with local need and is working with specific providers to ensure more high-quality provision is in place.

3.5 The capacity in the children's Brokerage Team has been increased to improve our ability to utilise intelligence about providers to source the right placement for children from when they first come into care. The team have a programme of work in place to fully utilise existing frameworks of preferred providers as well as to identify specific provision in line with specific children's needs, such as our children who have plans to STEP them down from residential care.

Foster for Plymouth Growth

3.6 So that more of our children in care can live with our foster carers close to Plymouth, we have:

- Introduced an improved offer for our foster carers based on what our foster carers told us at the 2024 Foster Carer Summit. The improved offer covers both enhanced financial and practical support alongside practice improvement work for our workforce which foster carers will be part of delivering. This has included foster carers now being exempt from Council Tax.
- Ramped up our marketing and recruitment work to attract new carers, including being part of the South West Regional Hub and having an increased presence with community groups, faith groups, businesses and partners (currently including Dartmoor Zoo) and across Plymouth to widen the understanding of fostering and encourage applications to foster from diverse experiences and communities.
- Improved our support to carers to enable them to care for children with more complex needs, including those stepping out of residential, through introducing a 'Mockingbird' model of support, emergency foster care model and a model for the bespoke package of support for young people stepping out of residential.
- Held an annual Foster Carer Summit to uphold our commitment to review the support and retention offer regularly with our foster carers. The next one is being held in early February 2025.

3.7 Our Foster Carer Ambassadors fed back that the new Support and Retention Offer to Our Foster Carers 2024/2025 is a fair and comprehensive offer and shows exemplary intentions. They feel that this will ensure that support is implemented and enables them to hold the Local Authority and partners to account if this is not achieved. They have also shared that through this process, and in the implementation of the new financial offer as well as the support and retention offer, they have felt listened to, heard and respected.

3.8 Fostering South West represents a partnership of 15 Local Authority Fostering services across the south-west of England collaborating to actively recruit essential prospective foster carers. The Hub is funded by the DfE and brings together a collective in-depth experience and knowledge of their local communities, the needs of families, children and the young people in their care. The Fostering South West Hub went live on the 28th April 2024 after a period of collaborative design and implementation, with the formal launch event taking place on 5th November 2024. Through

collaboration, the aim of the Hub is to grow the number of fostering households through shared marketing and recruitment activity, taking advantage of a dominant market presence in the South West.

- 3.9 The implementation of the Hub in April 2024 coincided with Foster for Plymouth's launch of the improved Financial Offer, which was accompanied by a significant amount of marketing activity and attracted local press coverage. As such the uplift in fostering enquiries this financial year could be attributable to one or both of these activities.
- 3.10 As part of the DfE funding related to the Regional Fostering Hub, Plymouth City Council received funding to implement their first Mockingbird Constellation which went live in November 2024. Mockingbird is a programme led by The Fostering Network in the UK to deliver sustainable foster care through an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community. Each constellation is led by a hub home carer and liaison worker, the constellation offers vital peer support and guidance alongside social activities and sleepovers to strengthen relationships and permanence. Plans are in place to introduce three further Mockingbird constellations in 2025/26.
- 3.11 In order to attract prospective foster carers and encouraging those already fostering for Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) to transfer to the Local Authority we have increased our marketing activity and developed this in line with feedback from prospective foster carers and our fostering community about what engaged them and attracted them to apply. Targeted marketing is effective in this regard, and this is effectively used through social media channels.
- 3.12 Working with representatives from four local businesses, the Council is developing an even more ambitious marketing strategy and plan for 2025/2026. This will be an invest to save proposal as a wider reach will draw more applicants but require investment in marketing and staff resources. Within this we will establish a care experienced digital marketing apprenticeship within the Foster for Plymouth team, which will enhance the marketing activity and offer a unique opportunity to a care experienced young person.
- 3.13 The Foster for Plymouth social media launch took place in October 2024 and the film is being widely shared across social media channels. Plymouth Arts Cinema have kindly agreed to share a version of the film within their trailers and Dartmoor Zoo have agreed to include our campaigns on their screens within their café area.

STEPping children from residential care to family settings

- 3.14 So that we realise our commitment to children growing up in families, we are:
- Challenging practitioners to be more ambitious for children in care to grow up in a family utilising an evidence-based tool (which evaluates children's needs by understanding behaviour, emotional wellbeing, risk to self and others, relationships and indicators of psychiatric or neurodevelopmental conditions) to inform our assessments and identify children and young people who are ready to step out of residential care into family settings and to ensure that this happens a timely way.
 - Ensuring our care planning for children supports children to be cared for in a family home.
 - For our older young people who are in residential children's homes, this includes consideration of moving into supported accommodation to prepare for independence or focus on a transition to adult services.
 - Meeting weekly as a management team, alongside the weekly Children's Resource Panels, to review progress of identified STEPs children and young people, review any children or young people who have recently moved into residential and review the circumstances of those previously not deemed ready to step out so as to ensure that the searches for family-based care happens without delay.

- 3.18 As a result of challenges in the sufficiency of family homes over recent years, we have not been as ambitious for children in care to be in family homes as we should be. The STEPS approach is challenging this including using an evidence-based approach to assess children in residential care and identify those who may be suitable for family homes. The approach includes writing updated profiles and pen pictures which focus on the child's strengths, needs and the desired outcomes. These are used to engage with Foster for Plymouth and IFAs on our Peninsula framework and the wider IFA market nationally, where this is appropriate for the child's care plan, to identify Foster Carers committed to a planned transition for the child out of residential. Despite our ambition for children to be in family homes and active searching for foster carers for around 20 children in residential settings this year, limited placement sufficiency both in the independent and in house fostering sectors has significantly impacted our ability to progress plans and achieve the target dates and associated savings anticipated. Over the past two years there has been a reduction of approximately 2000 foster carers nationally, partly as a result of the impact of the pandemic on family's capacity to free up a bedroom for fostering.
- 3.19 At the current time, there has been a greater level of success in progression of STEPs plans into in house fostering than IFAs and for some of our older young people, greater benefits have been realised from progressing step forward to supported accommodation. One child in the STEPs programme was successfully placed with foster carers in December and four children and young people have an identified in house fostering match which is being progressed, one child is expected to move by the end of January 2025, two siblings are expected to move by the end of March 2025 and the other child has a longer term plan due to the need to undertake sibling assessments and transitions, however there is a clear plan in place.
- 3.20 In addition to the five children and young people above, there are fourteen children and young people currently placed in residential children's homes who are being actively worked through the STEPs programme or for whom step forward planning was already in place to move from those settings to family home so a more suitable provision. Searches are active for all of these children and young people, however there are no current expressions of interest or placement offers. A further thirteen children and young people have been identified by the teams as being suitable to step out of residential in the next six months, these children and young people have all been booked in to Children's Resource Panel by the end of January 2025 to formalise the plan and timeframes for actions to achieve this.
- 3.21 Creative ways are being pursued to support the children and young people who have been identified for STEPs to refamiliarise themselves and build trust in living with a fostering family as well as supporting Foster Carers to think differently about their capacity to offer a child a home from residential. This includes one of the young people being included in the Mockingbird Constellation and those where a local family is being explored being invited to Foster for Plymouth Social Committee events.

Reunifying children with their birth families and wider networks

- 3.22 Reunification is when a child returns home from a period of being in care and is the most common way for children to leave care in England. Children in care should always be supported to maintain connections with their family networks as these are often their lifelong links. Many children may experience a short episode of care and return to their families once it is assessed as safe for them to do so. However, reunification refers to when children have had a long-term care plan, but where there are changes in the child and/or family's circumstances which enables a safe return home to be considered. To ensure we identify opportunities for children to return to their birth families when they have been in our care for some time and this can be achieved safely, we are:
- Supporting children to maintain lifelong links with their birth families.
 - Making sure that we continuously review changes in children's circumstances that may make reunification possible.

- Refocusing our Targeted Help offer to provide intensive assessment and support to enable more children to return home from care to their birth families.
- 3.23 The Edge of Care Team has developed a model of practice which supports children to return home from care in a planned and supported way when it is safe for them to do so as part of our Family Homes for Plymouth Children programme. This model sets out a practice framework based on good practice toolkits, which addresses these challenges. The framework is a resource to support practice improvements for children returning home from care and to support practitioners and managers with professional judgement to complex decisions about whether a child should return home from care and what support will be needed to ensure that reunification is safe and successful. It provides a structure for analysing risks to the child based on robust evidence. It supports families and workers to understand what needs to change, to set goals, access support and services and review progress. It builds on and complements the existing work that practitioners are already doing with these children and their families, rather than replacing it.
- 3.24 Children in care who may be suitable for planned work to consider a reunification plan are currently being identified and dedicated resource to support the detailed assessment and careful planning and support to families that is needed to ensure reunification is done safely and successfully is being agreed.

PCC becoming a provider of residential care

- 3.25 To increase the quality and availability of residential care for children local to Plymouth, Plymouth City Council is becoming a provider of residential care across a number of types of provision including short breaks for disabled children, short term intervention to return young people back home or support them into independence and longer-term residential children's homes for children with complex needs.
- 3.26 Positives of developing local in-house residential children's homes includes;
- Ability to support children with local education and health services.
 - Improved potential to achieve step down to fostering and reunification to families when children are in Plymouth.
 - Reducing the average length of time children spend in residential.
 - Improved experiences from children experiencing fewer moves.
 - Improved family time for children to maintain links and relationships with their families where possible.
 - Better quality assurance, scrutiny and consistency of care when delivered in-house and close to Plymouth.
 - Potential savings from preventing a child moving into an unregulated arrangement which can cost us £12,000 a week.
 - Savings from social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers not having to visit children at a distance from Plymouth.
- 3.27 Capital has been agreed to purchase two houses in Plymouth and to develop them as the first homes for six children (three in each) between 8 and 16 years old. The children's homes are being developed to resemble family life as far as possible. An offer has been accepted on one house and work is progressing to ensure the location is suitable and with a view to the home being refurbished and registered with Ofsted prior to opening towards the end of the year. Viewings are currently taking place for the second property. A key risk will be recruiting the managers and staff team with the required skills and experience and work is starting early with HR-OD colleagues to plan and deliver an effective recruitment campaign.

- 3.28 Capital has also been allocated to undertake a feasibility study of the suitability of an existing PCC building, Colwill Lodge, as a residential short breaks provision for children with disabilities which will be designed to support families and prevent children from needing to come into high cost residential provision. The feasibility study is due to be completed by the end of February to support a detailed business case to be considered for the capital investment that will be needed to refurbish the building.
- 3.29 Finally, we are currently working with ICB colleagues to consider a joint bid to the DfE for an allocation from a current capital scheme to support residential developments for children with complex emotional and behavioural needs who are at risk of placements requiring a deprivation of liberty.
- 3.30 Opening children's homes is a complex process and as well as the recruitment of staff, the requirement to register with Ofsted is identified as a risk to timescales as delays in Ofsted's response are being experienced nationally.

Support to special guardianship and kinship carers

- 3.31 The objective of this strand of work is to support more children to be with kinship carers, family or friends who step in to care for a child when their parent isn't able to, rather than the child coming into care. In addition, we are developing practice to enable more children in care to leave care through a Special Guardianship route.
- 3.32 To prevent children from being in care unnecessarily, there is a need to improve the identification of and support to kinship carers and Special Guardianship carers, this includes ensuring financial support is equitable to foster carers so that kinship carers are well supported when a child would otherwise have come into care and carers do not lose out when their child leaves care through a Special Guardianship arrangement.
- 3.33 During 2024-25 a new Special Guardianship and Kinship Carer Support Team was implemented and has been identifying best practice in this area, as well as putting in place a stronger support offer to carers, including confirming contributions from key partners such as Health and the Virtual School. We have been identifying kinship carers across Plymouth who were previously unknown to us and developing peer support networks with two already in place within Family Hubs. In addition, a Special Guardianship Support Plan approach has been developed ready for implementation with all carers to set out the support plan for a child before the order is made.
- 3.34 A Special Guardianship Policy has been agreed and is being implemented ensuring Special Guardians are well supported to meet children's needs, and a policy setting out the financial support that will be provided is being finalised for implementation early in 2025-26.

This page is intentionally left blank