

BCBC FINANCIAL IMPACT ON PLANNING ISSUES

Alarm bells ring over council's budget

by Lewis Smith
local democracy reporter

BRIDGEND County Borough Council (BCBC) council has published a report that shows an almost £10 million predicted overspend in the annual budget during the first quarter of the 2023-24 financial year.

Councillors in attendance at a cabinet meeting on 18 July heard how the figures reported up until 30 June were projected to be around £9.727 million over their expected budget at this point - made up from a £12.788 million net overspend on directorates, and a net under spend of £3.061 million on council-wide budgets.

The projected overspend is reported as being "primarily due to ongoing pressures within the social services and wellbeing directorate," as well as other pressures with the home to school transport budget.

Bridgend's total net revenue budget for 2023-24 is worth £342 million. Several members expressed severe concerns, with Cllr John Spanswick of Brackla urging decision-makers to think twice before spending every penny from now on.

As part of the council's performance management framework, budget projections are reviewed regularly by officers and reported to cabinet for assessment on a quarterly basis.

The report read: "Whilst budget growth of £8.174 million was approved by council as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2023-24, the directorate continues to see an increase in demand and the budget growth confirmed is currently insufficient to meet the increase in demand, with current projections

showing a £11.065 million overspend in 2023-24.

"Further consideration will be needed to be given by council to the sustainable resource required, specifically in children's services to improve the quality of outcomes for children and families in Bridgend. There is a projected overspend on home to school transport of £1.3 million."

This could now lead to what deputy leader Cllr Jayne Gebbie described as "difficult decisions," to address the pressures. Officers said the pressures were also being felt by a number of local authorities across Wales.

Council leader Huw David said: "We will be convening a task and finish group that specifically looks at the financial pressures and challenges within social services, and try to provide some efficient support for that services and its on-going journey of remodelling and managing within the financial constraints that we are facing."

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COUNCIL GETS UK FUNDING TO CLEAN UP CHEWING GUM

BRIDGEND County Borough Council (BCBC) has been given £12,000 to tackle the problem of chewing gum on the streets.

The council is one of 56 councils across the UK to get the cash from the Chewing Gum Task Force, now in its second year. It was established by Defra and is run by the charity Keep Britain Tidy.

The Task Force is funded by major gum manufacturers including Mars Wrigley and Perfetti Van Melle, with the investment spread over five years. This year the selected councils will receive funding totalling more than £1.2 million.

Monitoring and evaluation carried out by Behaviour Change, a not-for-profit social enterprise, has shown that in areas that benefitted last year, a reduced rate of gum littering is still being observed six months after clean-up and the installation of prevention materials. Estimates suggest the annual clean-up cost of chewing gum for councils in the UK is around £7 million.

BCBC's cabinet member for Climate Change and the Environment, Cllr John Spanswick said: "The funding will allow us to purchase four machines to help tackle the removal of chewing gum litter from streets."

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Active travel cash on its way to council

BRIDGEND County Borough Council (BCBC) looks set to receive around £1.5 million of Welsh Government funding to spend on active travel routes across the county borough.

It is likely to pay for new active travel routes, as well as consultation work for future schemes, with the largest allocation going to a new active travel route between Ynysawdre and Bryncethin.

The Welsh Government says its investment aims to encourage people to make more sustainable choices of travel for short journeys, such as cycling or walking.

Cllr John Spanswick, cabinet member for climate change and environment, said: "Earlier Welsh Government funding for active travel routes has allowed the county borough to benefit from active travel upgrades, including widened footways along sections of the A48 and A473 for shared use facilities, vegetation clearance, traffic sign and street lighting improvements and more.

"We welcome this further funding of £1.5m, so that we can continue to invest in active travel routes across the county borough"

By Lewis Smith, local democracy reporter

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