

## Action Plan

### Social Services

2023/24 Forecast Adverse Variances (as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023)

#### Appendix 2a

Service Area	2022/2023 Variance at Outturn 2023 £	2023/2024 Variance at June 2023 Forecast £	2023/2024 Variance at Sept 2023 Forecast £	Action Required & Timescale	Financial Impact  £	Responsible Officer
<b>Looked After Children</b>				<b><u>Reason for Adverse Variance</u></b>		Loredana Moruz
<b>Children's Homes</b>	(816,202)	(646,761)	(855,184)	The reasons for the increase in the adverse variance is due to 1 temporary placement, additional support required for 2 existing placements, and continuing care funding ceasing for 1 placement.		
<b>Independent Fostering Agencies</b>	(1,846)	(221,796)	(299,420)	The reason for the increase in the adverse variance is due to the number of placements increasing by 3 from 20 to 23 since June 2023.  <b><u>Actions</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement from the Head of Service (HOS) is required for all residential placements.</li> <li>• Each placement is being reviewed on a monthly basis by the Head of Service with Team Managers.</li> <li>• There are a number of preventative services in place, which include the Supporting Change Team and MYST,</li> </ul>		

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				<p>both initiatives will potentially reduce the number of children within residential placements in the long term.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In house provision of a Children's Residential Home and a multi-use provision is currently in the development stage, identified savings will be built into Bridging the Gap to support the Council's budget pressures in 2025/26 and future years.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Looked After Children</b></p> <p><b>Legal Fees</b></p>	(335,729)	(200,000)	(250,000)	<p><b><u>Reason for Adverse Variance</u></b></p> <p>The reason for the adverse variance is due to the requirement of using the external provider to finalise existing cases. All cases supported by the external provider will cease as at the end of October 2023</p> <p><b><u>Actions</u></b></p>		Rachel Price / Andrea Jones

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BGCBC has entered an SLA with Caerphilly CBC to provide Children's legal services. This arrangement commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and will mitigate this cost pressure for future years.</li> <li>• A two-tier system will remain in place for the current financial year 2023/24 until the existing cases have been finalised by the external provider. All new cases will be dealt with by Caerphilly CBC and will be funded through the SLA.</li> </ul>		
<b>Other Children's and Family Services</b>				<b><u>Reason for Adverse Variance</u></b>		Loredana Moruz
<b>Permanency Allowances</b>	(44,538)	(51,711)	(92,679)	The reason for this adverse variance is due to the number of Special Guardianship allowances gradually increasing, plus interagency fees.		
<b>When I'm Ready</b>	(52,974)	(64,320)	(64,320)	The reason for this adverse variance is the number of placements continually increasing,		

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				<p>placements have increased by 3 since March 2023.</p> <p><b><u>Actions</u></b></p> <p>The long-term plan is to cease commissioning costly Independent Fostering Agency Placements in line with Welsh Government's strategy to eliminate profit making provision for Children in Care by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2027.</p> <p>The Authority's focus will be to bring Independent Foster Carers in house and promote and provide alternative care provision such as Special Guardianship Orders which will reduce the CLA population in Blaenau Gwent.</p> <p>The savings achieved from reducing IFA's &amp; Residential Placements will mitigate this cost pressure and fund the expected increase in the alternative care provision in the future.</p>		

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<b>Older People (Aged 65 or Over)</b>  <b>Cwrt Mytton</b>	(437,937)	(113,115)	(121,946)	<p><b><u>Reason for Adverse Variance</u></b></p> <p>The reason for the adverse variances is due to an increase in staffing costs, in relation to the use of agency staff to cover vacant posts, sickness absences and the pay award.</p>		Hannah Baulch / Joanne Hawkins
<b>Learning Disabilities Aged 65 and Under</b>  <b>Supported Living Bungalows</b>	(124,323)	(49,451)	(71,847)	<p><b><u>Actions</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A staff restructure and recruitment drive has been undertaken within Provider Services to address the staffing issues currently encountered, these actions have improved the financial position from the Outturn.</li> </ul>		Alison Minett / Helen Beecham

## Action Plan

### Planning

#### 2023/24 Forecast Adverse Variances (as at 30 June 2023)

Appendix 2b

Service Area	2023/2024 Variance at June 2023 Forecast £	2023/2024 Variance at Sept 2023 Forecast £	Action Required & Timescale	Financial Impact  £	Responsible Officer
<b>Dealing with Applications</b>	(53,866)	(39,032)	<p><b><u>Reason for Adverse variance</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As a result of the implementation of a much-needed new back-office software system, a planning officer has been diverted 100% to data migration and project management duties. To fulfil our statutory obligations and provide acceptable service performance we are employing a Consultancy to pick up the officer's caseload. These ongoing consultancy costs are causing an adverse variance against the available budget.</li> <li>2. Potential £29K application fees had to be surrendered by the Authority as it related to a quarry application and these are dealt with by Carmarthenshire CC. Minerals planning is a specialist role and we have no inhouse expertise. Whilst this was not an additional cost to the authority, the application fee was passported to Carmarthenshire CC for their officer (who deals with many such applications for South Wales LPA's) to do the work. This would have mitigated some of the adverse variance. There were no alternative options available that would not have cost the authority significantly more to deal with the application directly.</li> </ol>		Service Manager – Development & Estates

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**Planning**

**2023/24 Forecast Adverse Variances (as at 30 June 2023)**

**Appendix 2b**

<b>Service Area</b>	<b>2023/2024 Variance at June 2023 Forecast £</b>	<b>2023/2024 Variance at Sept 2023 Forecast £</b>	<b>Action Required &amp; Timescale</b>	<b>Financial Impact  £</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>
			<p><b><u>Actions</u></b></p> <p>In order to continue meeting statutory obligations the need to utilise the Consultancy will remain, however this will only be for the migration and implementation period, after which the officer will return to their substantive role. The migration and implementation processes will be completed in the most efficient and effective manner to allow the officer to return to their normal caseload but to also achieve the benefits of a more effective and efficient planning software system for staff and the public. The progress of the system implementation and the use of consultancy will be kept under close review and the utilisation of consultancy will cease as soon as reasonably practicable, this could mitigate some of the forecast overspend.</p>		

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**Economy**

**2023/24 Forecast Adverse Variances (as at 30 June 2023)**

Appendix 2c

Service Area	2023/2024 Variance at June 2023 Forecast £	2023/2024 Variance at Sept 2023 Forecast £	Action Required & Timescale	Financial Impact  £	Responsible Officer
Estates Rechargeable	(78,453)	(78,846)	<p><b><u>Reason for Adverse variance</u></b></p> <p>The use of Agency staff for 2 Solicitors.</p> <p><b><u>Actions</u></b></p> <p>There is limited scope for dealing with the overspend. We have faced recruitment difficulties resulting in employing agency staff in the legal and surveying areas which comes at a premium. Salaries in the private sector in these areas far outstrip Blaenau Gwent rates and agency is the only option in the short term. We could terminate the contracts but this will result in ongoing vacancies in key areas such as managing the industrial portfolio and legal support. With the latter, this will impact on many other service areas such as Social Services and Public Protection, impact on key council projects and bridging the gap. This will result in other services having to procure external legal support which will likely increase costs to the Council.</p> <p><b><u>Update – Quarter 2</u></b></p> <p>This cost pressure is fully funded from within the overall portfolio underspend.</p>		Ellie Fry



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**Economy**

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<b>Nursery Units Industrial Premises</b>	(54,225)	55,328	<p><b><u>Reason for Adverse variance</u></b></p> <p>Whilst the rental income target is being achieved, an element is remitted back to Welsh Government in accordance with the joint Venture Agreement, resulting in a shortfall against the budget.</p> <p><b><u>Action</u></b></p> <p>A risk factor has been built into the financial forecast to allow for the risk of businesses ending their tenancy during the year and voids. Vacant units will be monitored during the year and working closely with businesses to ensure units are occupied.</p> <p><b><u>Update – Quarter 2</u></b></p> <p>Rental income has been reassessed and increased due to new opportunities arising and a reduction to the financial risk of vacant units during the year.</p>		Ellie Fry