

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) support was also accessed to refocus services.

The unadjusted overspend forecast for 2002/03 was under current estimates in the region of £2.7m. This was due to historical and new unfunded commitments such as adults and older people's services/ insurance/ transport/ demographic impact on demand for learning disability services/ court judgements. The costs of Persons From Abroad was now estimated to be £620,000 (NRF funding had recently been approved to cover this cost.), which adjusts the projection to around £2 million. Additional costs had also arisen from new Anti Social Behaviour eviction policies (£200,000).

He stated that it was still unclear as to how the promised 6% increase in funding from the Government would be fed through locally. There was scepticism over whether the promised increased funding would be genuinely 'new' money or funds that had been recycled from existing Social Services budget areas.

The Corporate Director took the Committee through a number of new demands on the budget for 2003/04, as well as a number of unfunded demands for 2003/04. He informed Members that it had not been possible to present a Draft Revenue Strategy (DRS) report to the Committee at this stage due to the need for further information from the Government, but that a DRS report would be prepared for the Scrutiny Committee meeting in January 2003.

He stated that in terms of 'bridging the gap', detailed options would be drafted for the January 2003 Scrutiny Committee. A case could then be put before the Council as a whole, to consider Social Services funding as a priority area.

The Committee agreed that an additional meeting of the Scrutiny Committee should be scheduled in February 2003.

Members asked for further information about the added costs to Social Services from new Anti Social Behaviour legislation. The Service Director (Children & Family Assessment & Strategy), stated that when families were evicted they did not have immediate entitlement to City Council accommodation, leaving them to make their own arrangements. This forced Social Services to make numerous difficult decisions on occasions where children were thought to be at risk. Entitlement to Housing Benefit was also lost. The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund offered some assistance, in that it enabled the Social Services Department to offer a rehabilitation service, to give families a second chance.

In response to members' queries about the added costs of people with learning disabilities, the Corporate Director stated that due to improved healthcare, individuals with learning disabilities were living longer and children with severe disabilities who would have previously died, were now surviving. This had therefore become a growth area.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Cabinet be requested to look at a strategy for Social Services funding, as the Scrutiny Committee expressed grave concern at the budget position as forecast by the Corporate Director, and the possibility of cuts in service and/or increase in charges.
- 2) a further report together with the draft Departmental Revenue Strategy be brought in January 2003.

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