

## Response to Request for Information

Reference FOI 002727  
Date 05 September 2018

### ***High Needs Block and Reserve***

#### **Request:**

I am requesting information under the Freedom of Information Act.

This request concerns various financial and expenditure data. The council's first instinct may be to refer me to published reports, such as annual budgets and revenue monitoring reports. However, the council should be aware that such reports are highly likely to be misinterpreted by those without an accountancy background - for example, understanding which, if any, line on an outturn statement counts as the overall outturn excluding DSG and prior to non-budgeted drawdown from general reserves (as per question 11) is likely to lead to misinterpretation. Simply redirecting to published council reports carries a significant risk of the council's actual financial position being misunderstood and misrepresented. Hence it is better for the council to provide the requested information.

#### High Needs Block

1. The monetary value of the council's High Needs Block allocation from the government each financial year for 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19.

Question 1 excludes any transfer of funds by the council from other parts of the DSG into the High Needs Block (or vice versa).

| <b>Financial Year</b> | <b>(£million)</b> |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 2015/16               | 25.8              |
| 2016/17               | 23.3              |
| 2017/18               | 25.1              |
| 2018/19               | 27.5              |

The forecast 2018/19 figures for the following questions 2-5 should be those forecast at the start of the financial year (e.g. as part of annual budget-setting), not forecasts produced by in-year revenue monitoring.

2. The monetary value of the council's actual High Needs Block expenditure each financial year for 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and forecast for 2018/19.

| <b>Financial Year</b> | <b>(£million)</b> |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 2015/16               | 26.7              |
| 2016/17               | 23.1              |

|         |      |
|---------|------|
| 2017/18 | 25.1 |
| 2018/19 | 27.5 |

3. The monetary value of the council's overspend or underspend (please specify) on its High Needs Block each financial year for 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and forecast for 2018/19.

| Financial Year | (£million) | Under/Over |
|----------------|------------|------------|
| 2015/16        | 0.9        | Over       |
| 2016/17        | 0.2        | Under      |
| 2017/18        | 0          |            |
| 2018/19        | 0          |            |

4. The monetary value of transfers (a) to the council's High Needs expenditure from other parts of the council's DSG allocation, and (b) from the council's High Needs Block allocation to other parts of the council's DSG expenditure, each year for 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and forecast for 2018/19.

| Financial Year | (£million) |
|----------------|------------|
| 2015/16        | 0.9        |
| 2016/17        | 0.4        |
| 2017/18        | 1.8        |
| 2018/19        | 0.8        |

5. The monetary value of the council's remaining schools reserve at the end of each financial year for 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and forecast for 2018/19. Please specify when a provided figure represents the schools reserve in deficit.

| Financial Year | (£million)           |
|----------------|----------------------|
| 2015/16        | 11.1                 |
| 2016/17        | 6.7                  |
| 2017/18        | 5.1                  |
| 2018/19        | Too early to provide |

6. Any proposals the council has adopted or is considering adopting to reduce (or limit increases in) its High Needs expenditure in 2017/18 or 2018/19, including (but not limited to) mitigating action to tackle forecast High Needs Block overspends in 2018/19, or changes to eligibility for or provision or staffing of special needs education, or restrictions to eligibility for or provision of special needs education transport services.

[Proposed SEN Matrix Funding Review, Establishment of High Needs Review Sub Group as agreed by Schools' Forum; increasing provision within the city.](#)

### Reserves

7. The monetary value of the council's remaining unallocated financial reserves (excluding schools reserves) at the end of each financial year for 2015/16, 2016/17, and 2017/18.

| Financial Year |                               | (£million) |
|----------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| 2015-2016      | Unallocated Financial Reserve | 10.0       |

|           |                               |      |
|-----------|-------------------------------|------|
| 2016-2017 | Unallocated Financial Reserve | 10.0 |
| 2017-2018 | Unallocated Financial Reserve | 10.0 |

8. The combined monetary value of the council's remaining allocated financial reserves (excluding schools reserves) at the end of each financial year for 2015/16, 2016/17, and 2017/18.

| Financial Year |                              | Total Allocated Reserves (£million) | Total School Reserves (£millions) | Total Allocated Reserves Excluding School Reserves (£million) |
|----------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 2015-2016      | Allocated Financial Reserves | 70.1                                | 11.1                              | 59.0  |
| 2016-2017      | Allocated Financial Reserves | 61.3                                | 6.7                               | 54.6  |
| 2017-2018      | Allocated Financial Reserves | 55.7                                | 5.1                               | 50.6  |

The figures for the following questions 9 and 10 should factor in planned savings on council expenditure - i.e. they should not simply forecast a reduction in reserves equivalent to the predicted gap between income and expenditure before the effect of planned savings.

As for questions 2-5, the forecasts in questions 9 and 10 should be those made as part of the council's annual budget setting and/or medium term financial plan, rather than a reflection of 2018/19 in-year revenue monitoring.

9. The forecast monetary value (if such forecasts exist) of the council's remaining unallocated financial reserves (excluding schools reserves) at the end of each financial year for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21.

| Financial Year |                               | (£million) |
|----------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| 2018-2019      | Forecast General Fund Balance | 10.0       |
| 2019-2020      | Forecast General Fund Balance | 10.0       |
| 2020-2021      | Forecast General Fund Balance | 10.0       |

10. The forecast combined monetary value (if such forecasts exist) of the council's remaining allocated financial reserves (excluding schools reserves) at the end of each financial year for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Based on existing approved reserve allocations it is anticipated that allocated financial reserves excluding school reserves will be in the region of £40.0 million at the end of 2018-2019 financial year. We currently do not have a forecast yet for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 financial year.

## Outturn

11. The monetary value of the council's final outturn position (excluding DSG) each financial year for 2015/16, 2016/17, and 2017/18 (i.e overspend, underspend or balanced spend - plus monetary value). The figures provided should show each year's outturn \*prior to drawdowns from reserves that were not included in the planned annual budget\* - in other words, not simply a balanced budget position because the council raided its reserves at the last minute.

*The Councils outturn position in each of the last three financial years was an underspend as reported in the Outturn report for each year.*

| Financial Year | (million £) | Status     |
|----------------|-------------|------------|
| 2015-2016      | 9.4         | underspend |
| 2016-2017      | 0.3         | underspend |
| 2017-2018      | 0.8         | underspend |

12. Please list the budgeted savings measures that did not achieve their savings target in 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18, categorised by directorate - for each savings measure, please state the budgeted savings target and the actual saving achieved that year.

The above for information has now been considered and the City of Wolverhampton Council is not obliged to supply the information you requested for the reasons set out below.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires City of Wolverhampton Council, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you, the applicant with a notice which:

- (a) states the fact,
- (b) specifies the exemption in question and
- (c) states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies:

In relation to your particular request, the following exemption applies:

### **Section 12 - Exemption where cost of compliance exceeds appropriate limit**

We can confirm that the Council holds information falling within the description specified in your request. However, Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 allows a public authority to refuse a request if the cost of providing the

information to the applicant would exceed the 'appropriate limit' as defined by the Freedom of Information.

The Regulations provide that the appropriate limit to be applied to requests received by local authorities is £450 (equivalent to 18 hours of work). In estimating the cost of complying with a request for information, an authority can only take into account any reasonable costs incurred in:

- (a) *Determining whether it holds the information,*
  - (b) *Locating the information, or a document which may contain the information,*
  - (c) *Retrieving the information, or a document which may contain the information,*
- and*
- (d) *Extracting the information from a document containing it.*

*For the purposes of the estimate the costs of performing these activities should be estimated at a rate of £25 per hour.*

The information appertaining to your request is not easily accessible and as such this information is not held as a distinct set able to be retrieved or reported on. To get the information would require a full scale look into all individual budgets. This would be a manual exercise and as such we believe that the aggregated time it would take to collate the information would be in excess of 18 hours (equivalent to a notional cost of £450).