

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE

DATE OF MEETING: 23 OCTOBER 2019

SUBJECT OF REPORT: MONTH 5 BUDGET MONITOR

TOWN OR PARISH: ALL

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: RICHARD PENSKA, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

KEY DECISION: YES

REASON: Financial values contained throughout the report, including virements, are in excess of £500,000

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive are asked to;

- i. Note the projected revenue and capital budget forecasts as detailed within the report,
- ii. Note the revenue budget virements within Appendix 2 that have been approved during the year,
- iii. Note the allocation of £80k from within the corporate risk reserve to fund costs associated with the emerging climate change emergency,
- iv. Approve the amendments to the capital budgets as detailed within Appendix 6

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report provides a summary of the council's financial performance after the first five months of the 2019/20 financial year in respect of both its revenue and capital budgets and it highlights the key financial variances and movements which have taken, or will take, place during the year.

The report also advises on the impact that forecasted financial variances could have on the level of general reserves.

2. POLICY

The council's budget monitoring is an integral feature of its overall financial processes, ensuring that resources are planned, aligned and managed effectively to achieve successful delivery of its aims and objectives.

The 2019/20 revenue and capital budgets have been set within the context of the council's medium term financial planning process, which support the adopted Corporate Plan 2015 to 2019.

3. 2019/20 BUDGET MONITORING

3.1. Introduction and context

Previous financial reports and information have shown that the council has continued to face a challenging financial outlook due to the rising cost of our services, including, for example, those related to children's and adult social care and home to school transport, alongside ongoing reductions in government funding.

Government resources have continued to reduce since 2010, nevertheless the council prepared a robust budget for the 2019/20 financial year giving particular attention to realign resources and cover the main pressures faced in previous financial years. Significant growth was allocated in both adults and children's social care as well as to cover key service risks such as Home to Schools Transport and inflation on core contracts.

The 2019/20 revenue budget also incorporated savings plans of £10.854m and managers have been striving in recent months to deliver these. Clearly savings plans of this magnitude introduce a degree of financial risk into the council's budget however this is continually reviewed and managed on a regular basis. To account for the key financial risks, the council does hold an earmarked 'financial risk' reserve, with a view that this will primarily be accessed in the event that some savings may not fully be achieved from the start of a new financial year, or demand-led pressures exceed those planned throughout the year.

3.2. Revenue budget summary

Shown below is a summary of the council's overall forecast financial position after the first five months of the year using the forecast information provided by Directorates.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2019/20							Movement from Month 4
	Month 4 Forecast			Month 5 Forecast			
	Net Revenue Budget £000	Projected Out-turn £000	Projected Variance £000	Net Revenue Budget £000	Projected Out-turn £000	Projected Variance £000	
People & Communities;							
- Adult Social Care	65,840	65,971	131	65,840	66,038	198	67
- Children & Young People	28,929	30,020	1,091	28,929	30,067	1,138	47
- Housing	1,646	1,646	0	1,646	1,645	(1)	(1)
- Public Health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
- Schools & DSG	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	96,415	97,637	1,222	96,415	97,750	1,335	113
Development & Environment	36,138	37,016	878	36,138	37,151	1,013	135
Corporate Services	6,762	7,317	555	6,762	7,055	293	(262)
Capital Financing & Interest	11,221	11,221	0	11,221	11,072	(149)	(149)
Non Service - Precepts & Levies	5,135	5,135	0	5,135	5,135	0	0
Non Service - Contingency & Other	3,157	2,102	(1,055)	3,157	2,102	(1,055)	0
Total Revenue Budgets	158,828	160,428	1,600	158,828	160,265	1,437	(163)
General Fund Financing Budgets	(158,828)	(158,828)	0	(158,828)	(158,828)	0	0
NET REVENUE BUDGET TOTALS	0	1,600	1,600	0	1,437	1,437	(163)

1.01%

0.90%

DSG deficit at 1 April 2019	-2,376	-2,376
Projected net movement during 2019/20	328	-246
Projected DSG deficit at 31 March 2020	-2,048	-2,622
Public Health Reserve Balance at 1 April 2019	472	472
Projected net movement during 2019/20	-144	-149
Projected Public Health Reserve at 31 March 2020	328	323

The table indicates that the council will spend more on delivering its services to the public, compared to the resources it has available in the current financial year, and at this point in the year we are forecasting that there is likely to be a projected **net over spend of £1.4m** or 0.90% compared to the budgeted position.

This is a net position with 'service' areas broadly spending approx £2.6m more than the allocated budget provision, although a proportion of these over spends have been offset by generating additional levels of interest on our cash balances, and also utilising the council's unallocated contingency budget.

Whilst the forecast does show an over spend of £1.4m, and not a balanced budget, it should be noted that not all areas of the council's budget have been reviewed in detail and so there may be opportunities to identify underspends or budget mitigations which could be used to offset any adverse spending. That being said, the council has noticed some emerging trends in recent weeks, particularly in relation to childrens' services, which could worsen our budget forecasts as we move through the remainder of the financial year.

Further work will be completed over the next few months to review all aspects of the council's budget, with a view to clarifying the overall position and these updates will be included within future reports.

At this time the projected net over spend of £1.4m does not account for any drawdown of the specific Financial Risk Reserve which has been established to cover key risks such as demand pressures or one-off spending, although this will be reviewed during the course of the year.

3.3. Revenue Budget – service summaries

The financial monitoring processes are consistently applied and embedded throughout all of the council services, and then consolidated and reviewed by the corporate management team. A key cornerstone of the council's process require a financial summary to be prepared by each director and is included in **Appendix 3**. These summaries provide a detailed breakdown of significant financial variances and cover movements in both expenditure and income.

The summaries allow for a better understanding of all components of the budget, and highlight which variances will be linked to proposed movements within earmarked reserve balances at the end of the financial year. They also show the results of the targeted mitigations and action plans which have been implemented in order to reduce any areas of over spending. Key extracts from these summaries is provided below.

3.3.1 - People & Communities – Adult Social Care (£0.198m projected over spend)

The overall forecast year end position for Adult Care and Housing Service is now a net over spend of £198k (or 0.3% of the net budget). This initially suggests that a relatively stable and sustainable budget position appears to have been reached following successive years of budget growth, combined with a programme of savings designed to impact both on demand and on unit costs. However, it is very early in the financial year and there is still a degree of uncertainty and the forecast relies on assumptions about factors such as short-term placements, increases in demand, children transitioning to adulthood, client contributions and MTFP savings to materialise.

It is worth noting that, because of the continued announcement of one-off grants, approximately £1.6m of commitments are funded from one-off resources. In addition, the impact of the change

in position in relation to s117 cases is also beginning to be felt and is being discussed with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). These factors, together with the likely increase in demand for services, are being considered as part of the 2020/21 MTFP process. Whilst additional government grants have been a feature of recent local government finance settlements, and indeed were announced as part of the most recent Spending Round, only a Comprehensive Spending review will determine whether and how much of this additional funding will be sustained in the medium term.

The main areas of current forecast net variance to budget are as follows:

Service Area	Net Variance (£000s)
Individual Care Packages	(81)
Assistive Equipment and Technology	35
Information and Early Intervention	58
Social Care Activities	254
Commissioning	(68)
Total Adult Care and Support	198

Should an over spend remain at the year end, it is possible that residual one-off reserves or grants could be used to offset this.

A system is in place to monitor the achievement of savings that were written into the 2019/20 budget. Some savings targets are often difficult to monitor, given that many relate to cost avoidance or mitigation of future cost increases rather than simple reductions in expenditure. That said, good progress is being made with many projects, including increasing the number of shared lives carers, reviews of whole home supporting living schemes, the new supported living scheme at Clifton Road, reviewing the funding of supported accommodation contracts, independent reviews of care packages and some increased contributions from the CCG in relation to health needs.

3.3.2 - People & Communities – Children’s services (£1.138m projected over spend)

Some significant growth was applied to the Children’s Services budgets in 2019/20 and this has largely closed the gap between the budget and the demand for placements for looked after children, although some growth in numbers and costs is now beginning to materialise. In addition, historic cost pressures continue in other areas such as adoptions, children’s centres and early years’ nursery provision, legal costs, support to families with disabled children and education related services. The main areas driving the projected overspend are summarised below:-

	P5 Variance £000	Change from P4 £000
Placements for looked after children	139	74
Adoption Inter Agency Fees	255	0
Prior Year Unidentified MTFP Savings	100	0
Legal Costs (children looked after)	125	0
Children’s Centres and Early Years Provision	109	(102)
Capita One SIMS Licences Contract	92	0
Disabled Children’s Services	52	2
Other	266	73
Total	1,138	47

This months' report focusses on placements for children looked after.

Net budget growth of £1,105k was provided in the current year (£2.55m of growth and £1.445m of savings); the forecast overspend on placements of £139k currently represents an increase in spend from the previous year of around £247k (2.6%) as can be seen below:

	2018/19	2019/20	Change
Budget	£8,561,090	£9,666,089	£1,104,999
Spend	£9,557,254	£9,804,644	£247,390
Variance	£996,164	£138,555	(£857,609)

In general terms, in relation to the numbers of placements, there is little overall movement (2.1%) between the position for 2019/20 compared with 2018/19. The most significant changes reflect a reduction in residential placements (although average unit costs have increases), in part due to the so far successful implementation of the Step Down programme, and an increase in independent fostering as a result of the increase in children looked after experienced at the beginning of this calendar year. The reduction seen in 2018/19 in kinship and parent and baby assessment placements has been sustained, and it is also worthy of note that there are currently no secure accommodation placements.

Significant work has been done to gain a better understanding of the activity and unit costs associated with the various placement types. In general terms, the increase in numbers experienced at the beginning of this calendar year has been sustained. It is also worth noting that, since the end of this monitoring period, the number of children looked after has increased from 238 to 249. If this increase is sustained, this could lead to additional costs in region of £175,000 in the current year and £350,000 in a full year.

The Children's Transformation Programme is designed to address some of these issues. In 2019/20, the priorities for savings are the Step Down project, which is designed to move appropriate children who are currently in residential care back into family settings, and a reduction in staffing costs. Evaluation of the Step Down project so far indicates that savings of around £417k have been achieved for the 2019/20 financial year.

The Edge of Care Social Impact Bond (SIB) also continues to address some of this financial pressure by mitigating future increases in costs. Analysis indicates that the number of children aged 10 and over coming into care under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 in 2018/19 has reduced by 55% when compared with 2016/17.

The Council has begun its medium term financial planning for 2020/21 and beyond, and this is discussed elsewhere on this agenda. One of the principles that it will continue to follow will be to close the gap between the budget and the projected spend, particular in those areas when demand is most difficult to manage. It is expected that the key areas of overspend detailed in this report will feature in terms of budget growth.

3.3.3 - People & Communities – Schools & Dedicated School Grant (£2.622m proj deficit)

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is a ring-fenced grant, which must be used in support of the schools' budget. The majority of the funding is for academies and is paid direct to them by the DfE, using the formula agreed by the Strategic Schools Forum (SSF) for funding all schools in North Somerset, whether they be maintained or not.

At the end of the 2018/19 financial year there was a deficit of £2.376m, which was transferred into an earmarked reserve rather than impact on the council's general fund balance. The deficit

relates entirely to spending on the “high needs block”, which funds education for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and reflects the 80% increase in the number of children with the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) from 2015 to 2019.

At its meeting in January 2019, the SSF agreed a minimum annual contribution to the deficit recovery of £500k. All other things being equal, this would pay back the deficit over a period of around 5 years.

The table below illustrates the projected deficit balance to carry forward at year end.

Area	£000s	£000s
Brought Forward deficit		2,376
Deficit recovery from DSG		(500)
In-year variances:		
- Out of Authority Placements	591	
- Top Up Funding	88	
- Speech and Language Support Assistants - Support Services Education contract (net costs of decommissioning service)	69	
- Other	(1)	
Sum of in-year variances		746
Deficit to carry forward		2,622

Although high needs spending and deficit recovery has been partially addressed as part of the 2019/20 budget setting process, where significant reductions were made to the Top-up funding values, mitigating actions will need to continue beyond 2019/20 as continued significant movement of funding from the schools’ block to the high needs block is unlikely to be forthcoming. Short term measures include the implementation of the review of top-up funding; medium term measures include the implementation the Specialist and Alternative Provision Review, which includes the following key projects:-

- The submission and progression of a bid to the DfE as part of the Wave 13 SEND and AP Provision Free School Bid, for a 65-place Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Special School within North Somerset
- The delivery of a 5-place expansion to Baytree Special School in its current site for September 2019 admissions
- The commencement of the programme and statutory process to deliver an expansion to Baytree Special School to a new site with facilities for 65 new places for pupils with severe and profound learning disabilities, from September 2021.
- The commencement of the programme and statutory process to deliver an expansion to Westhaven Special School to extend the school’s lower age to age 3
- The commencement of the programme and statutory process to deliver up to four new Specialist Units (for up to 40 pupils) to meet the needs of high functioning pupils with autism on mainstream school sites

The Spending Round published by the Government in September announced additional funding for education and, of particular note for the Council, an increase in funding for the High Needs Block. Whilst this extra resource is welcome, it needs to be seen in the context of three main calls on this funding:

- The current projected DSG deficit
- The expectation from the DfE that transfers from the schools block to the high needs block will need to be reduced
- The increase in demand for spending in the high needs block, in particular in relation to out of area school placements and additional funding for maintained special schools and resource units

The separate deficit in relation to the Council's maintained Alternative Provision at the Voyage Learning Campus (£832k) is also worthy of note in this context. The Council is supporting the school to develop a budget recovery plan to ensure that future spend is in line with available funding and that the deficit is recovered over a reasonable period of time.

3.3.4 - Development and Environment (£1.013m projected over spend)

There are a number of reasons why the Development and Environment budget is currently overspending, and the main reasons are described below;

- Although c£600k of growth was included when setting the 2019/20 budget there remains significant pressure within the Home to School Transport service in this financial year largely as a result of:
 - Significant upward inflation in the local market, especially within Weston due to the limited number of providers in the area.
 - Out of County placements that the Council must pick up the costs for also remain a risk.

The over spend has recently increased as there have been several additional placements to out of county SEND provisions in the last couple of months, and there remains a risk that there may be more of these before the end of the financial year. However, there is a significant transformation plan formulated with the service, alongside procurement and finance colleagues, to mitigate some of these market pressures and provide more clarity in processes.

- The other major area of concern in D&E relates to the leisure assets that remain within the council's management. Members may be aware that emergency works have been carried out in both Parish Wharf and Backwell leisure centres, specifically the replacement of the boiler at Parish Wharf, and the roof at Backwell, which has resulted in unbudgeted costs totalling over £400k being incurred during this financial year. It should be noted that the forecasts include loss of income claims and repairs and maintenance costs to the best of our knowledge at this time.
- Seafront activities also remain a risk, due to the seasonality and volatility of income, so this will be monitored closely over the coming months. The main areas of variances forecast are within seafront parking and events income.

In order to mitigate the significant pressures within the service this year a number of actions are being discussed for potential implementation in the forthcoming. These include vacancy management measures, generating additional income opportunities where appropriate, and reviewing earmarked reserves. Although it is noted that reserves are one-off funding and can only be used as a short-term measure in some instances until such time as the underlying savings plans and mitigations are delivered. The use of any reserve could provide a risk to service resilience in the future.

3.3.5 - Corporate Services (£0.293m projected over spend)

The majority of the adverse financial forecasts for the corporate services directorate largely remain unchanged from the previous report and relate to several significant budget pressures, including;

- shortfalls in property related income levels and an increase in property maintenance related contract costs,
- delays in the realisation of MTFP savings proposals, both for the current, as well as previous financial years – largely relating to the Support Services Contract, CCTV Service, and Common Officer transformation proposal,
- loss of income from Avon & Somerset Police following changes within the Town Hall Gateway.

Managers remain committed upon achieving a balanced budget position by the end of the financial year and have been exploring ways to achieve the agreed savings plans or provide alternative mitigations which will offset any projected budget short-falls. This strategy has been fairly successful as we can see that the anticipated net over spend has reduced from its previous level of £555k, and it is hoped to reduce this further over the next few months.

Further mitigations are likely to include the acceleration of potential savings proposals which may be considered for inclusion within future budgets, and also consideration of a range of internal measures such as increasing income opportunities, tighter vacancy controls in some teams, and reviewing spending plans with a view to reducing or deferring non-essential spend where possible.

It should be noted that each of the budget pressures faced during the current financial year will be reviewed as part of the ongoing medium term financial planning work to ensure that longer-term mitigations and actions are identified to avoid similar issues being experienced and reported in future years.

3.3.6 - Capital Financing & Interest & Non Service budgets (£1.204m under spend)

As can be seen from the financial summary approximately 7% of the council's revenue budget relates to capital financing costs, which means that they are linked to expenditure and funding within council's capital programme and also its treasury management activities. Fluctuations within a wide range of both internal and external outcomes, assumptions and policies, in both the current and also previous financial years, can have a significant impact upon the amount of capital expenditure incurred, the interest that will be paid on the long-term borrowing, or on the amount of interest that can be generated on surplus cash-flow balances.

At this time it is anticipated that the council will receive more interest on its surplus cash balances compared to the budget, and further movements may be expected as a result of changes in the amount of capital expenditure incurred which is to be financed through external borrowing. It should be noted that although the Bank of England base rate has remained stable, the money markets rates have fluctuated over recent months largely as a result of external factors such as Brexit, and these rates will do impact on our investment returns.

The most significant under spend reflected within the Non Service budget area relates to the council's £900k contingency budget, at this point in the year it is projected that there will be no direct calls on this budget and so will be under spent by £900k. This means that the under spend is being used to offset adverse variances elsewhere within the council's budget. It should be noted that if this position changes, and expenditure is incurred and charged to the contingency budget, then the forecast will be updated and the under spend reduced, thereby worsening the

council's overall budget position.

3.4. Revenue Budget – mitigations and further actions

The council has adopted a business partnering approach for the delivery of its financial management services. This allows finance officers to work closely with their managers and provide a consistent range of financial advice and support to service managers as well as to the corporate management team (CMT).

The council's financial performance is therefore continually reviewed, assessed and challenged by the corporate management team on a monthly basis, together with the key risks and assumptions that were included within the medium term financial plan.

CMT maintains a focused scrutiny on the core risks and uncertainties held within the budget, in order to understand those which may be likely to vary before the end of the financial year, and quantify the range of financial impact this may bring.

It is anticipated that reviews in the forthcoming weeks will widen to include other areas of the council's budget in order to identify mitigations which can be used to bring the current overspend down. These may include items such as capital financing strategies, investment returns, staffing budgets, use of reserves and a review of MTFP savings plans. Further updates will continue to be provided within future reports.

3.5. Revenue Reserves – General & Earmarked

The council's **general reserve** balance at the start of the year, often referred to as the Working Balance, **was £9.053m** which equates to approximately 5.7% of the net revenue budget. It is currently anticipated that the only draw on these reserves would be the requirement to fund any residual over spend remaining at the end of the financial year, i.e. currently the net over spend of £1.6m identified in para 3.2 above. This would bring the balance on the reserve down to £7.616m, or 4.8% of the net revenue budget.

External auditors would usually expect the council to hold general reserves of at least 5% of the net revenue budget to cover one-off or unplanned spending pressures or financial risks, meaning that other measures or actions may be required during the remainder of the financial year.

In addition to the general reserve balance the council also has a series of reserves which it can use to support spending within the revenue budget or hold to cover future financial risks. These are known as 'usable' reserves and are held on the council's balance sheet. Some of these reserves are 'general' in nature whereas other reserves are 'earmarked' and held for specific purposes.

Ear-marked reserves are largely created in order to;- provide resources for a range of one-off programmes, invest in planned future expenditure or service improvements, deliver the outcomes required by unconditional service related grants received from the government and / or external partners, or to provide the council with cover from potential financial risks. Their use is part of a sound strategic financial plan.

Directors share details of the planned transfers between reserves and their revenue budgets within the monthly budget monitoring framework – specific details of current plans are included at the end of their financial commentaries, as can be seen within Appendix 3.

In addition to the ongoing plans a decision has been made to allocate resources to support delivery the council's climate change agenda and visioning. A one-off sum of £80k has been set aside from within the corporate risk reserve to fund the recruitment of a new post to cover this important area. Longer-term planning and resource allocations will be brought into the council's MTFP considerations.

3.6. Capital Budget – current financial performance

The capital programme covers the period up to 2023/24, although does give particular focus and attention for the 2-year period 2019-2021. The programme covers all aspects of the councils' services and has been built up in several phases following different stages of approval.

Appendix 5 presents a detailed schedule of all projects currently contained within the capital programme which includes the budget for the current year and also the following financial years. At this time it is estimated that the council's overall programme totals £152.249m, £104.103m of which relates to the current financial year.

In addition to the approved capital expenditure **budget** for each project, the schedule also provides details of how much expenditure has been incurred to date, together with how these schemes **will be funded** and what types of resources will be used. The summary shows that the largest proportions of the programme will be funded from the receipts of external grants and contributions (£95.616m), and by increasing the council's long-term borrowing (£39.156m).

The capital summary shows that the council has spent, and ordered, approximately £25.079m of the 2019/20 programme which equates to 24% of its budget for the year. The spending profile of large capital projects is often different to the profiles within the annual revenue budget, in that a large degree of planning and preparatory work is carried out towards the start, in advance of actual spend being incurred.

Appendix 6 details changes to the approved capital programme reflecting re-phasing of capital works, increased grant funding and other decisions recommended for approval by the Investment & Infrastructure Board or the Section 151 Officer. These changes require formal approval through this report.

In addition, the schedule also reflects changes that have been considered and approved by other governance routes by way of a separate report, such as the Executive or Council. Although these items do not require additional approval, they have been included to enable Members to see a complete picture of changes within the programme during the current financial year.

4. CONSULTATION

The report has been developed through consultation with the council's corporate management team and also with each of the departmental management teams.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial implications are contained throughout the report.

6. LEGAL POWERS & IMPLICATIONS

The Local Government Act 1972 lays down the fundamental principle by providing that every local authority shall make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs, although further details and requirements are contained within related legislation. The setting of the

council's budget for the forthcoming year, and the ongoing arrangements for monitoring all aspects of this, is an integral part of the financial administration process.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The council faces a wide variety of climate change and environmental impacts whilst delivering its many services to residents, some of which have a direct or indirect financial impact or consequence. There are referenced or noted, where appropriate, throughout the report and associated appendices.

As can be seen in paragraph 3.5 above, resources totalling £80k have been set aside in the 2019/20 financial year to fund the costs associated with the recruitment and appointment of a climate change post to help deliver on the council's key strategic objectives.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

The council faces a wide variety of risks whilst delivering its many services to residents, some of which may have a financial consequence or impact. The most significant financial risks for the 2019/20 revenue budget are contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan approved by the Executive in February 2019 and regularly reviewed by the corporate management team and the S151 Officer.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The 2019/20 revenue budget incorporates savings approved by Members in February 2019, all of which are supported by an equality impact assessment (EIA). These EIAs have been subject to consultation and discussion with a wide range of stakeholder groups to ensure all risks have been identified and understood.

10. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

There are currently no specific corporate implications within the report. The relationship between the budget process and its continued ongoing monitoring arrangements have to be fully integrated if the council is to achieve the required financial outcomes it requires.

Members will be aware that robust financial management and strong internal controls will play a key part in delivering successful service outcomes as well reducing financial risk.

11. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

N/A

APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Revenue budget summary for 2019/20
Appendix 2	Schedule of revenue budget virements – for information
Appendix 3	Financial commentaries from each directorate management team
Appendix 4	Monitoring of the 2019/20 MTFP budget savings
Appendix 5	Monitoring the of the capital programme
Appendix 6	Schedule of capital budget virements – to be approved

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Medium Term Financial Plan incorporating the 2019/20 revenue and capital budgets –
Executive, February 2019;
Budget Monitoring Report - Executive, September 2019