

CABINET
16th January 2024

FINANCIAL MONITORING 2023/24 AND REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25

Report Submitted by: Nigel Aurelius, Deputy Chief Executive
Report Written by: David Lilly, Director, Financial Services
David Weaver, Group Finance Officer - Service

Key messages

The key messages are:

- The 2023/24 revenue budget forecast has improved over the month 6 position.
- The forecast for the year end reserves position remains consistent with previous reports, with limited new usage of the General Fund approved.
- The receipt of the Council's 2024/25 provisional settlement announcement is broadly consistent with the level assumed in the initial draft estimates.

1.	<u>Area Affected</u>
1.1	County Borough Wide.
2.	<u>Purpose of report</u>
2.1	The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The latest revenue budget forecast for the 2023/24 year, • The Council's 2024/25 provisional settlement from the Welsh Government, • The updated 2024/25 position and the actions taken to reach this position, and • Next steps in the 2024/25 budget setting process.
3.	<u>Background</u>
3.1	This is the third monitoring report considered by Cabinet for the 2023/24 budget.
3.2	The report outlines an updated estimate position for the 2024/25 financial year.
4.	<u>Financial forecast 2023/24</u>
4.1	The following table summarises the latest revenue forecast for 2023/24 using November 2023 (month 8) data.

£000s	2023/24 Working Budget	Month 8 2023/24 Forecast	Full Year Variance Forecast to Budget (Favourable) / Adverse		
			Nov	Sept	July
Children & Family Services	110,458	111,520	1,062	312	203
Adults & Communities	48,937	47,802	(1,135)	(552)	(459)
Economy & Environment	21,928	22,429	501	245	65
Resources	16,097	16,033	(64)	(198)	(66)
Capital Financing	9,278	8,591	(687)	(531)	(188)
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	10,298	10,366	68	118	106
South Wales Fire Authority	5,409	5,409	0	0	0
Finance Other	117	(314)	(431)	(428)	(432)
Centrally Held Budgets	481	50	(431)	(206)	(206)
Total	223,003	221,886	(1,117)	(1,240)	(977)

4.3	The primary variances are created by:
4.3.1	Children & Family Services – this adverse variance is almost entirely related to pressure on the Childrens Social Care placements budget. Whilst the forecast for the number of placements with a financial impact is only slightly over budget (454 against 450 budgeted), the cost per placement is significantly higher due to difficulties with the availability of appropriate placements in the marketplace.
4.3.2	Adults & Communities – most of this favourable variance continues to be linked to the Adults Social Care function (£1.4million forecast underspend), with employee vacancies being the major contributing factor. Across the wider service area there are also further staff underspends which are offset by the loss of income from the closure of the Community Farm.
4.3.3	Economy & Environment - as can be seen from the table above, the adverse position on this service area has grown significantly during the reporting cycles. The principal area is a net cost pressure of £587,000, after reserve funding, in the Waste Service with, in addition, to the previously reported pressures across a number of aspects of the vehicles budget, there is now also a pressure in the staff agency budget. Other divisions of the service area are providing a small forecast underspend to slightly offset the Waste pressures.
4.3.4	Resources - this forecast position continues to be mainly from employee underspends from vacancies, turnover etc. partly offset by a reduced forecast for Housing Benefit subsidy income
4.3.4	Capital Financing – the continuation of this favourable forecast is largely caused by the effects of the slippage experienced in the 2023/24 capital programme on the level of debt repayments, together with debt rescheduling activities & higher investment returns from higher than budgeted interest rates.
4.3.5	Finance Other - this line contains items that do not readily fit in any other budgets. The key areas impacting the position are relatively unchanged from previous monitoring updates, namely the delay in the implementation of the school leaver scheme (£200,000) and “one off” non-domestic rates credits for properties that have been revalued (£136,000)

4.3.6	Centrally Held Budgets – this budget had previously held our pay contingency (£1.8million); now that the NJC pay award has been resolved most of this budget has been transferred to services – there is a balance of £128,000 not required. In addition to this sum, this favourable variance also continues to relate to an unallocated budget that will not be used this financial year.																																			
4.3.7	With regard to the two areas of significant in year budget pressure (Childrens Social Care and Waste Services), the Senior Leadership Team are working with those areas to determine what actions can be taken to mitigate the positions for the remainder of the financial year and ensure no repetition into 2024/25.																																			
4.4	In line with Budget Holder responses the above forecast assumes the delivery of mitigations approved by Council in February 2023.																																			
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5.	<u>Reserves update</u>																																			
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5.2	The projected 2023/24 use of the General Fund, as defined by the month 8 monitoring position, is outlined below. Two new approvals were approved since November 2023 totaling £331,000.																																			
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	Farm subsidisation	67	67
	TLT additional funding – single year 2023/4	500	500
	EDRMS project year 2	254	254
	Ash Die back	67	67
	Recycling Waste & Fleet	93	93
	Accommodation Project - Civic Centre	51	51
	Workplace Transformation Costs	97	97
	Building CAD drawings and Condition Surveys (new)	300	0
	British - Phase 2 due diligence & legal agreements (new)	31	0
	Projected 2023/24 movement	3,156	3,006
6.	<u>Provisional settlement 2024/5</u>		
6.1	<p>The Council received its 2024/25 provisional settlement from Welsh Government on the 20th December 2023. The key information is as follows:</p> <p>a) A Welsh average 2024/25 settlement increase, on a like for like basis, of 3.1%, with increases ranging from the floor protection of 2% in Conwy and Gwynedd to 4.7% in Newport. The floor funding mechanism supporting Conwy and Gwynedd is funded from outside the settlement at a cost of £1.3million.</p> <p>b) Torfaen’s 2024/25 funding uplift is 3.24%, on a like for like basis, or £5.583 million when compared to the 2023/24 final settlement.</p> <p>c) There are no new responsibilities identified within the papers.</p> <p>d) No grants were transferred into the settlement at the provisional settlement stage.</p> <p>e) Details of the All-Wales grant awards were included in the announcement, and this is reproduced at Appendix 1. Welsh Government have also indicated that they are mindful of the administrative burden that accompanies hypothecated grants, and that they are working, through their relevant departments, to include hypothecated grants within the final 2024/25 revenue support grant. Details are expected to be concluded before the final 2024/25 settlement announcement and we are anticipating that any transfers in will be neutral.</p> <p>f) A rationalisation programme has been already actioned within the Education area, which has seen 18 grants streams merged into 4 funding streams, however the details of how these new grants will operate are yet to be received. The amalgamation predominantly relates to the hypothecated pre-16 education grant funding which is currently provided to local authorities and regional consortia and partnerships. From the 2024/25 financial year, the Local Authority Education Grant will be provided to local authorities which will include funding elements for School Standards, Equity, Reform and Cymraeg 2050. The aim is for these new arrangements to enable Local Authorities to maximise the funding that is available to allocate to schools, and ensure grant processes are less complex, more transparent and cut out unnecessary bureaucracy. This change, and in particular, no funding being allocated to regional education consortia directly, will have to be carefully worked through to ensure stability during any transition.</p> <p>g) The announcement included reference to two reductions in key grants, one reduction relates to the Social Care Workforce Grant, this grant is outlined to reduce by £10million on an all-Wales basis to £35million, whilst a reduction of £11 million in the homelessness grants allocation from their 2023/24 levels of £27.5million to £16million are proposed for 2024/25.</p>		

	<p>h) The increase in the NDR multiplier has been set at a 5% increase to the 53.5p rate in the £.</p> <p>i) The announcement also reduced the NDR relief for retail, leisure, and hospitality businesses in 2024-25 to 40%, down from the 75% provided in 2023-24. As in previous years the relief will be capped at £110,000 per business across Wales.</p> <p>j) The announcement outlines that the Council's unhypothecated capital allocation is £5.393 million for 2024/5, which represents a £1million increase over our programme assumptions.</p>
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6.2 In a separate announcement on the 20th December, Welsh Government also confirmed that they would be increasing the unit cost hypothecated support provided to Local Authorities in delivering their national policy of providing free school meals to all primary pupils. It is estimated that this increase will, based upon projected meal numbers, provide an additional resource of £194,000.

7. Activities / proposals to revise the initial 2024/25 estimates

7.1 Cabinet will recall that the initial estimates produced, after allowing for a 4.95% Council Tax increase and an anticipated 3% increase in Welsh Government unhypothecated funding, an adverse funding position of £11.9million, which through proactive activities, was reduced to £2.816 million as follows:

	£000s
Total (before unhypothecated funding)	11,918
Less additional assumed Welsh Government (RSG & NDR)	(5,173)
Less Additional Council increase over 2023/24 level	(2,504)
Forecast 2024/25 Net Estimate Gap all Services	4,241
Less school community mitigations	(1,425)
Residual 2024/25 Net Estimate Gap	2,816

7.2 Since the November Cabinet report officers have identified actions that will assist in addressing this initial adverse position as follows:

Service	Proposal	£000s
Children & Family Services	Estimate for Social Care Children's residential placements rebased in line with existing demand	(525)
	Rebase estimate for recruitment of MyST carers	(55)
	Reduction in Legal budget	(50)
	Reduce estimate for Family Placement Team Enhanced Allowance – as all eligible carers have already applied	(57)
	Rebase Adoptions external placements to an assumed 7 instead of 8	(36)
	Revise estimate Out of County Education ALN placements	(145)
	Reduce the contingency for Schools in-year Pupil Trigger (Growth) based on recent usage	(54)
	Rebase Leadership capacity budget provision	(50)
	Removal of one-off budget provisions (2023/24 related)	(30)
	Include budget for anticipated additional income for Special Needs Resource Base placements	(27)
	Removal of a vacant post	(26)
	Introduce a vacancy saving target within the Education service	(36)
	Charge schools for SIMS (Schools IT system) license costs inflation	(10)

	Reduction of travel, supplies & services in line with existing spend levels	(10)
	PRU - removal of a small contingency budget	(10)
	Play Service – budget for additional income in line with existing levels	(10)
	Use service area reserve to fund contract inflation in the Home to School Transport budget	(200)
	Use service area reserve to fund the 2024/25 cost of primary expansion at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw	(71)
	Use service area reserve to fund the estimated increase in the cost of retired Teachers recurring compensation	(97)
	Use service area reserve to fund the Energy Pressure (non-schools)	(100)
	Use service area reserve to fund the anticipated additional costs of the Rising 3's provision	(46)
	Removal of RIF tapering assumptions (to be confirmed)	(147)
	Total Children & Family Services	(1,792)
Adults & Communities	Reduction in Adults & Commissioning Respite Budget	(100)
	Use service area reserves to fund Adult social care one-off short-term costs	(330)
	Reduction of the initial SRS core estimated contribution	(58)
	Removal of RIF tapering assumptions (to be confirmed)	(136)
	Remove additional budget for 2 x Torfaen Talks editions	(15)
	Total Adults & Communities	(639)
Other	Delivery of storage buildings rationalisation programme	(67)
	Energy efficiency works & behaviours programme (non-schools)	(69)
	Impact of additional council tax base at the proposed 2024/25 fee level	(327)
	Total Other	(463)
Total		(2,894)

7.3 During the process of reviewing and identifying the above mitigations additional cost pressures have been identified that arisen through recent announcements and the refinement of estimates as follows:

Additional cost pressures		£000s
<i>Children & Family</i>	Additional costs associated with ALN Transport	100
<i>Corporate</i>	Additional allowance for change to Real Living Wage	120
<i>Children & Adult Services</i>	Anticipated impact of the reduction in Social Care Workforce Grant	373
<i>Corporate</i>	Fire Levy – increase proposed by the South Wales Fire Authority in December 2023 is additional to the initial communications	128
<i>Children & Family Services</i>	Add: potential continuation of additional Crownbridge classroom @ Penygarn	150
	Less: Funding Crownbridge Penygarn additional classroom by Service Area Reserves for 2024/25 with a full review to be completed	(150)
Total		721

7.4 In bringing the above paragraphs together the following table summarises the current position.

Updated Summary position	£000s
Identified shortfall @ November 2023 Scrutiny / Cabinet	2,816
Mitigations identified (from para 7.2 above)	(2,894)
Revised position	(78)
Potential net additional costs (from para 7.3 above)	721
Net Position	643
Less: Other mitigations	
WG unhypothecated funding greater than assumed levels	(411)
Anticipated WG increase in Universal Free School Meals unit rate grant support	(194)
Position post Provisional Settlement	38

7.5	In relation to the mitigations required to deliver a balanced delegated schools position these mitigations will be accomplished through individual school budgets; the required amount remains at £1.4million.
7.6	In bringing the above together the following summarises the latest 2024/25 estimate position. This position will change as the estimates continue to be reviewed.

£000s	2023/24 Control Budget	2024/25 Initial Draft Estimate	Variance to Control Budget	Current 2024/25 Estimate
<i>Schools Delegated Budgets</i>	73,763	78,497	4,734	76,947
<i>Children & Family Services</i>	35,933	39,620	3,687	38,185
Children & Family Services + Schools	109,696	118,117	8,421	115,132
Adults & Communities	48,523	50,695	2,172	50,022
Economy & Environment	21,480	23,606	2,126	23,539
Resources	15,826	16,067	241	16,052
Capital Financing	9,278	8,723	(555)	8,723
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	10,298	10,910	612	10,910
South Wales Fire Authority	5,409	5,571	162	5,699
Finance Other	116	186	70	186
Centrally Held Budgets	2,377	1,046	(1,331)	1,193
Total before unhypothecated funds	223,003	234,921	11,918	231,456
<i>Less Unhypothecated funds</i>				
Welsh Government (AEF & NDR)	(172,405)	(177,578)	(5,173)	(177,988)
Council Tax	(50,598)	(53,102)	(2,504)	(53,430)
Net forecasted funding shortfall	0	4,241	4,241	38

8.	<u>Scrutiny activity</u>
8.1	The Cross-Cutting Resources and Corporate Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the initial draft 2024/25 budget on the 14 th November 2023 and were invited to examine the presented report and initial estimates and make comments for consideration by the Cabinet including any suggestions for savings / mitigations. No recommendations were made by the Scrutiny Committee.
9.	<u>Risks</u>
9.1	The estimate proposals inevitably include risks that have to be acknowledged and managed through the remainder of the process and through delivery of the individual services in 2024/25. The principal risks identified are:

- a) The estimates have been built upon a 'steady state' service delivery, although where either increased costs or reductions in income are anticipated these are included.
- b) The estimates have been based upon an assumed 2024/25 pay award of 4.0%, if the actual pay award exceeds this level, then this will have to be funded with impacts across all services. Each 1% variance equates to circa £1.2 million p.a.
- c) General inflation has been assumed at current prevailing rates, should the level of inflation increase, this will need to be addressed by the individual budget / service areas within their agreed funding envelopes.
- d) Estimates have been constructed utilising agreed activity /demand levels with budget-holders, any adverse changes in year will need to be addressed by the individual budget / service areas.
- e) The level of hypothecated funding is based upon the best available information. Any adverse changes will need to be reflected in further estimate iterations and related service delivery considerations.
- f) The impact of the Homelessness grant reductions is unclear from the Welsh Government announcement. As details emerge of the individual amendments, these changes will need to be considered against resource availability and service delivery.
- g) No update has been received from the Welsh Government regarding their proposal to revise their approach to the Regional Integration Fund (RIF) which funds numerous initiatives across the Council. This lack of information has meant that we have removed the possible pressure of £283,000 from the initial estimates. Any adverse changes will need to be reflected in related service delivery considerations.
- h) A number of mitigation proposals utilise one off reserve funding (£664,000) to support continuing services prior to the conclusion of service reviews to deliver efficiency values in future years. It is essential that these reviews are concluded and implemented promptly and in advance of the budget build process for 2025/26. A further £330,000 reserve funding is being used to fund one off costs included in the 2024/25 estimates.
- i) Delivery of change / mitigation proposals. It is essential that all measures are implemented in full. If any Service Area is unable to achieve the proposal in full, then it is a requirement that that Service Area must identify alternative funding and ensure that the delayed proposals are implemented in readiness for the 2025/26 budget.
- j) It has been assumed that the increased cost of teachers and fire fighters' pensions will be fully funded by the UK Government and consequently passed on by the Welsh Government. The letter that accompanied the settlement contained specific reference to this as follows: *"The Chancellor's Autumn Statement referred to the changes to the SCAPE rate, which has implications for the costs of employers' contributions to teachers and fire-fighter pensions. This in turn has implications for Local Authority budgets. Funding for this is expected to be provided by UK Government but not until 2024-2025. I will be writing to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to press for assurances on the level and timing of this funding"*. Therefore, at this stage whilst our assumed approach would appear reasonable it nevertheless represents a significant risk to be aware of.

10.	<u>Action to be taken following decision</u>
10.1	The following outlines the remainder of the budget cycle: a) Cross-Cutting Resources and Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the proposals for the 2023/24 financial year – 31 st January 2024, b) Cabinet to consider the outcomes of January Scrutiny, the final budget proposals, Medium-Term Financial Plan forecasts - 20 th February 2024, c) Council budget setting - currently 27 th February 2024, d) Receipt of the Council’s 2023/24 final settlement in March 2024.

11.	<u>Wider Impact Assessment</u>
11.1	The report is not supported by an integrated assessment tool, as this report provides an update of the current financial projections in relation to 2023/24 and 2024/25. As decisions relating to future service delivery are progressed these will be subject to their own well-being assessments.

12.	<u>Recommendations</u>
12.1	It is recommended that Cabinet: a) Notes the current year forecast, b) Notes the Provisional Settlement announcement as it affects Torfaen County Borough Council, c) Endorses the measures currently proposed to address the forecasted 2024/25 position, and d) Notes the timetable for the remainder of the 2024/25 budget cycle.

Appendices	1. Welsh Government Provisional Settlement - All Wales grant list 2024/25
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Background Papers	a) Council – February 2023 - Budget 2023/24 and Medium-Term Financial Plan b) Cabinet – September 2023 - Initial financial forecast 2023/24 c) Cross Cutting Resources and Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee – November 2023 - Initial Revenue Estimates 2024/25. d) Cabinet - November 2023 - Financial Monitoring 2023/24 and Revenue Budget 2024/25.
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For a copy of the background papers or for further information about this report, please telephone: *Nigel Aurelius, Deputy Chief Executive, 01495 742623*

Appendix 1

List and estimated amounts of Grants for total Wales (£000)

Portfolio and Grant Name	2023-24	2024-25
<u>Total Education and Welsh Language (of which below)</u>	619,582	620,735
Local Authority Education Grant - Schools Standards	n/a	159,864
Education Improvement Grant (EIG)	115,196	
Recruit Recover Raise Standards – the Accelerating Learning Programme	37,500	
Foundation Phase Nursery (FPN) Funding	5,268	
Local Authority Education Grant - Equity	n/a	154,865
Pupil Development Grant	120,803	
Pupil Development Grant - Consortia	6,928	
Elective Home Education	1,709	
Transition support for Minority Ethnic and Gypsy, Roma, Traveller learners	11,000	
Community Focussed Schools	7,225	
Grant to support & promote a whole school approach to Emotional & Mental Wellbeing	3,550	
Education Welfare Officers	2,500	
Local Authority Education Grant - Reform	n/a	54,405
Regional Consortia Grant	40,792	
Additional Learning Needs Implementation	11,997	
Additional Learning Needs Provision	9,155	
Online Individual Development Plan Grant	924	
Local Authority Education Grant - Cymraeg 2050	n/a	9,700
Welsh in Education	2,671	
Late Welsh Immersion Grant	2,200	
Welsh Education Grant – Consortia	1,829	
Promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh Language	348	
Local Authority Post-16 Education School Sixth Forms Provision (Mainstream Funding)	113,892	113,892
Adult Community Learning Provision	6,479	6,479
Universal Primary Free School Meals	62,988	93,500
School Essentials	13,596	13,096
Post-16 Specialist Placements	TBC	TBC
National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH)	TBC	TBC
Teachers Pay	21,267	0
Free School Meals - Holiday provision	8,958	0
Virtual Schools	TBC	0
Youth Support Grant	10,806	11,483
SEREN	TBC	TBC
Mutual Investment Model - Revenue	0	3,451
<u>Total Climate Change (of which below)</u>	380,077	346,954
Housing Support Grant	169,202	169,348
Mandatory Concessionary Fares	60,483	60,483
Bus Emergency Scheme	42,000	39,000
Bus Services Support	24,800	24,800
Sustainable Waste Management Grant	16,400	TBC
Homelessness - No One Left Approach	15,000	10,000
Homelessness - Discretionary Homelessness Prevention	12,500	6,000
Coastal Risk Management Programme	11,359	11,326
Cardiff Harbour Authority	6,078	6,126

Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management	5,250	4,950
Cleddau Bridge removal of tolls (A477)	3,000	3,000
Affordable Housing Grant	2,515	2,515
Youth Discounted Travel (My Travel Pass)	2,000	2,000
Road Safety Grant	1,749	1,900
Leasing Scheme Wales (Revenue)	1,555	2,599
Local Area Energy Planning - Technical Support	1,427	0
Homelessness - Strategic Posts	1,320	1,320
Transforming Towns Revenue Programme	1,000	TBC
Local Air Quality Support	750	TBC
PRS Leasing Scheme Pathfinder (Revenue)	577	530
Local Area Energy Planning - Resource Support	457	407
Resilient AONB programme	350	350
AONB Sustainable Development Fund – Revenue	100	100
Rural Housing Enabler	58	58
South Wales Regional Aggregate Working Party (RAWP)	50	50
Waste Planning Monitoring Report – North Wales and South-East Wales	48	48
North Wales Regional Aggregate Working Party (RAWP)	25	25
Waste Planning Monitoring Report – South-West Wales	19	19
Implementation of measures to tackle nitrogen dioxide exceedance	5	0
Total Health and Social Services (of which below)	280,110	250,501
Children and Communities Grant (CCG)	171,744	174,583
Social Care Workforce Grant	45,000	35,000
Childcare Offer	20,000	0
Early Years Integration Transformation Grant	6,000	TBC
Childcare Offer- Administration Grant	3,250	3,250
Adoption Services	2,300	0
Additional Support Grant – Childcare Offer	2,000	2,000
Funding for local authorities to support age friendly communities	1,100	1,100
Increasing Play Opportunities Grant	1,000	TBC
Implementation of the Performance and Improvement Framework	880	880
Foster Wales	559	0
National Approach to Statutory Advocacy for Children and Young People	550	550
Connected Communities, Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund	477	477
Adoption Register for Wales	219	220
Safeguarding Boards – training	72	72
Data Officer to support Eliminate Profit PfG	30	30
Maintenance of Wales Safeguarding Procedures	25	25
Support proposals relating to eliminating profit from the care of looked after children	15,509	0
Support proposals relating to radical reform of the care of looked after children	9,395	0
Support proposals relating to eliminating profit from the care of looked after children & relating to radical reform of childrens services	0	28,605
Adoption Services, Foster Wales and Adopt Cymru	0	3,709
Total Finance and Local Government (of which below)	130,382	79,530
Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief	129,510	78,730
Child Burials and Cremation Fees and Additional Financial Support Grant	800	800
Assets Collaboration Programme Wales Phase 3	72	TBC
Total Mental Health and Wellbeing (of which below)	42,063	44,063
Substance Misuse Action Fund	39,063	41,063
Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)	3,000	3,000

Total Economy (of which below)	31,593	24,489
Communities for Work+	27,268	16,834
Arfor 2	4,000	7,000
Tech Valleys programme	175	180
Event Wales	125	475
Mid Wales Sites & Premises Programme Development	25	0
Total Social Justice & Chief Whip and Social Partnership (of which below)	6,947	6,537
Period Dignity in Schools and Communities	2,923	2,523
Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence - Revenue Grant	2,794	2,794
Community Cohesion	1,120	1,120
Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence - Revenue Grant - Ask and Act	90	90
Armed Forces Day	20	10
Total Rural Affairs & N Wales, & Trefnydd (of which below)	1,090	1,014
Animal Licensing Wales	890	914
LA Animal Health & Welfare Partnership Delivery Plan	200	100
Total Arts, Sport & Tourism (of which below)	199	379
Culture Revenue Grant	179	179
Specialist Service Grants	20	200
All Grants	1,492,042	1,374,201