



Cabinet Member Report for Finance

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 18th January, 2021

Finance

Our Auditors continue to work on the 2018-19 Accounts, with the aim of formal sign off by March 2021 Audit Committee. The draft Statement of Accounts for 2019-20 has been published and the audit will now cross into the new authority. Action is being taken to ensure continuity of service as part of the Unitary Finance Workstream, as this will be required to support the closedown and SoA for 2020-21.

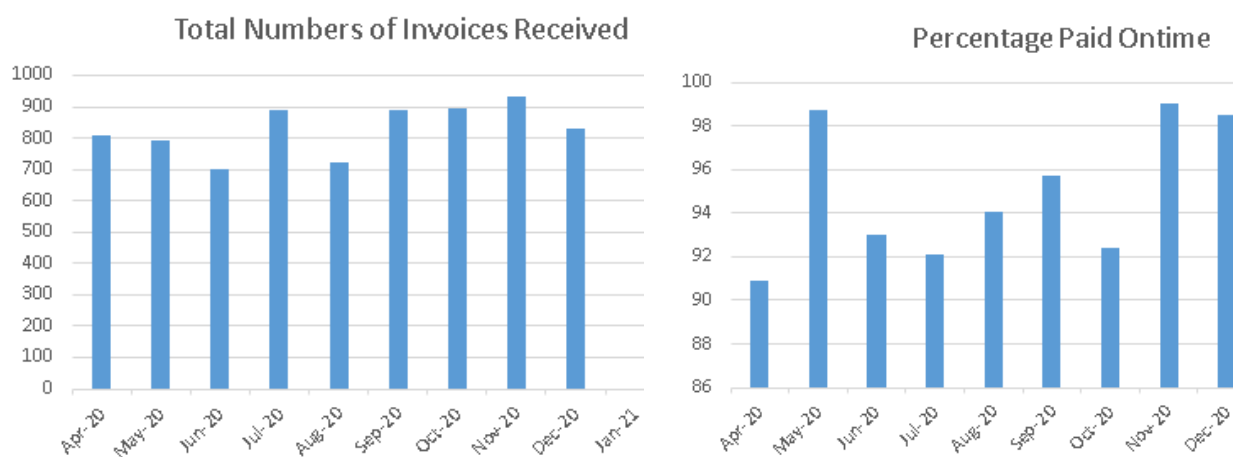
The new shadow authority published its draft budget on 23rd December 2020. Our finance teams are now active in support of the new authority budget and financial planning, in addition to continued support for the Borough in respect of in year management and business cases.

Cabinet received its last report on the current year budget in December which reflected a small underspend, after considering service pressures arising from Covid and the grants that have been provided to support us.

A final Budget Monitoring Report will be provided to Cabinet in February 2021.

NBC currently has £3.096M aged debt, a reduction of £540K from my last report to Council. NBC in accordance with Government Guidance, did not seek to actively pursue debt during the initial three months of the pandemic. Soft reminders have now commenced, with a view to formal actions if required, when the courts open proper. A considered approach is being taken in respect of all debt and the ability to pay.

Although the Accounts Payable/Receivable Team have suffered from reduced resources as a result of the pandemic, along with major involvement with the creation of the new West Northants Council, they continue to operate a good service and seek to pay invoices on time, despite the complexities of remote working and new processes. I am pleased to report that we are returning to a more acceptable level of invoices paid on time, in this new normal environment.



Revenues & Benefits

This service area is perhaps one of the most affected within my portfolio in respect of working to support the Covid19 solutions.

Council Tax collection remains volatile, at present the core collection rate has not dropped materially. However, our forecasts suggest that once the furlough schemes come to an end, the phased reduction commencing now, we can anticipate an increase in benefit claims and a reduction in Council Tax payments received. In addition, we are seeing an increase in Council Tax Reduction Scheme requests.

BEIS Business Grants Schemes from the initial Lockdown have now closed. Final applications have been processed and a reconciliation process has been completed with BEIS, confirming we have accounted for the £36,306,500.00 correctly, that we distributed.

Having successfully implemented new systems to deliver these Business Grants, the Government instructed Local Authorities to administer the Track and Trace payment system.

We continue to administer a range of BEIS Business Support Grants from November and will be making arrangements to activate the Portal to process the new grants announced relating to the current six week lockdown, at the time of writing I am aware our officers are scouring Government sites for guidance and awaiting a funding allocation.

There are now 7 schemes live and active with more due to go live as a result of the new lockdown. Since the start of November we have distributed over 700 grants to businesses worth £1.2M. We continue to ask local businesses to check our website and apply for grants they are entitled to through our portal system.

This will be a payment of £500 for those that have been instructed to self-isolate for two weeks by the NHS Trac & Trace service. There are two schemes, the first is driven by entitlement to specific existing benefits/criteria. The second is referred to as discretionary but is based on a second set of criteria for those that are on low incomes and cannot work from home and will suffer a loss of income. This will be administered by our Revenue & Benefit Service. The numbers of likely claimants is not anticipated to be high, but it is a further pressure on this service and resources.

At the time of writing we had paid 110 claims (£55,000) that met the NHS/Government criteria.

Wider CFO Team

The wider teams continue to actively support the wider front-line services in respect of HR matters, Wellbeing, Health & Safety, ICT, Governance, Risk Management, Audit and general financial support. They are also in the process of launching a revised DSE process with an aim of making our staff more resilient whilst working from home or office. Some of these assessments and measures will also be rolled out to Councillors.

All CFO teams are actively seeking to support Future Northants, whilst maintaining 'Business As Usual' (BAU) and Covid related challenges.

There will be a particular emphasis in this final quarter of 2020-21 on the Governance aspects of 'closing down' the Council in respect of records (paper and electronic), novation of contracts, migration to new accounting and HR systems and closedown of the 2020-21 Financial Year.

Facilities Management

The Facilities Team like many businesses, have suffered income loss for bookings etc. With the lockdown easing, there is a revival of enquiries and with some future bookings being taken.

The Guildhall Team continue to receive enquiries and some bookings in respect of weddings, the reduction from '30' to '15' attendees is deterring some from booking, along with the risk of local lockdown action (a national concern for such events).

The Guildhall Team have also been working with contractors appointed by Asset Management to safely remove asbestos from the basement/boiler areas as part of the boiler renewals.

The teams continue to work hard to support all services with deep cleaning, installed new security doors in the Guildhall, protective screens in the One Stop Shop, maintaining the full post room service, where scanning documents for electronic use is even more critical than normal.

The Guildhall Team are also supporting the wider CFO Governance Group in supporting all services to cleanse basement archives in addition to clear desks and reducing paper stored in cabinets.

Some of the recent achievements include:

- The refresh of the Court Room commenced with the stonework being cleaned and repairs to the bar, including new flooring and a lick of varnish.
- Guildhall roof works went out to tender
- Blue Plaques Panel whittled nominees down to 8 for further research into their contributions to Northampton and to check no skeletons that could come out later.
- 5th deep clean of Guildhall complete and all Porter/Cleaner targets achieved
- A total of 48,407 items of post dispatched
- 1,093 incoming documents scanned onto EDRMS, 993 incoming Revs and Bens documents indexed along with 3,611 incoming Revs and Bens e-mails indexed
- 1,198 planning letters e-mailed in by home workers – printed, enveloped and dispatched
- 603 items of mail usually distributed to departments by Post Room trolley, scanned and e-mailed to departments
- 2 wedding bookings secured for 2021 and an enquiry for a large event in 2022.

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Cabinet Member for Finance