



## Cabinet Member Report for Finance

### Northampton Borough Council

Monday 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

#### Finance

The Finance Teams (NBC & LGSS/NCC) are reviewing the SoA 2018-19 working papers, prior to the Auditors return in October. They are also finalising the draft Statement of Accounts (SoA) for 2019-20.

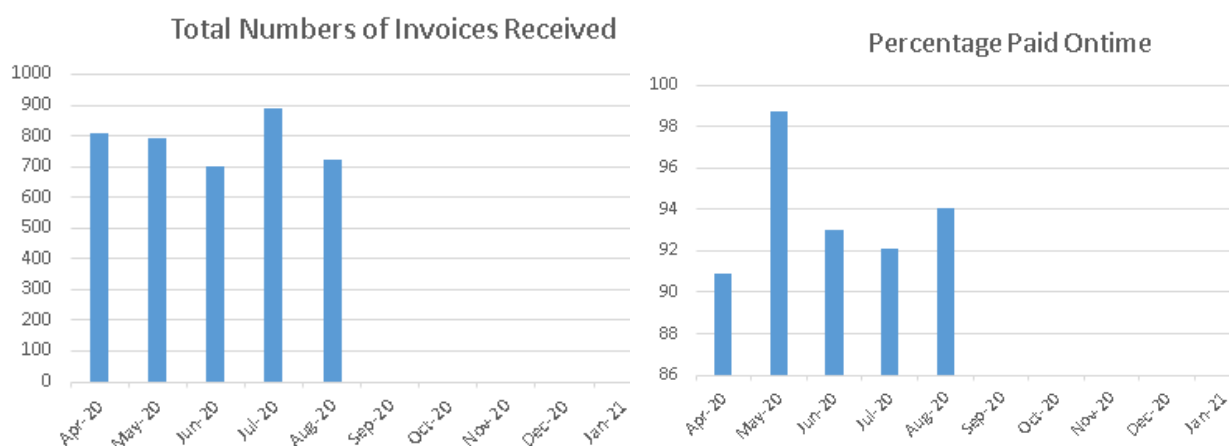
Whilst the Finance Team will not be building a budget for NBC for 2021-22, they will be part of the new West Northants Council resource to construct the first budget for the new council, in respect of the elements that will be moving across from this council.

Cabinet received a additional Finance Monitoring Report in August and the Period 4 report will have been received at Cabinet on the 9<sup>th</sup> September. I am pleased to advise that that report reflects a decrease in the projected year end overspend to below £1M. This may reduce further as we understand better the grant requirements and our ability to claim for loss of fees and charges directly related to Covid19.

We expect to have a more detailed report at Cabinet in October that will outline our costs and pressures relating the pandemic, reflecting the mid-year position and a better understanding of how the remainder of the year might pan out.

NBC currently has £4.271M this is a growth of c£400K from that reported in July, however £1.070M of the aged debt is under 30 days. NBC has, in accordance with Government Guidance not sought 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.

Although the Accounts Payable/Receivable Team have suffered from reduced resources as a result of the pandemic, they continue to operate a good service and seek to pay invoices on time, despite the complexities of remote working and new processes.



#### 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.

BEIS Business Grants Schemes have now closed. Final applications within the system are being processed at speed as all final payments must be made by the end of September, the balance of the funds provided will then need to be returned to Government.

I am pleased to advise that our teams, through Scheme One, have distributed c2,700 grants to business in our Borough, with a value of £34M. With Scheme Two (Discretionary Scheme) seeing £1.720M distributed to c260 businesses

This is addition to the £34M of Business Rates relief across the Small Business, Retail, Hospitality, Leisure and Nurseries sectors. Cancelling and adjusting all of these bills has consumed more of this service resource.

In respect of collection rates and debt management, the Management Board and service have complied with Government Guidance and sought to actively support those that cannot pay or are having difficulty paying, through moving payments schedules from 10 instalments to 12, signposting to benefits and use of the hardship fund in extreme cases. We are mindful that with the Furlough Scheme being phased out, there may be an increase in job losses leading to an increased activity in benefit claims and a reduction in Council Tax collected. We are also very aware of the risk and impact on Business Rates (National Non-Domestic Rates – NNDR) in the current year and future years.

## **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 managed the first wedding since lock down in the Court Room on Saturday 11th July, this was for 30 people, with social distancing measures in place; everything went well, and the bride and groom were very happy.

NCC Registration Service have also started to perform wedding and civil partnership ceremonies at the Guildhall since 4th July

The Guildhall Team are beginning to receive enquiries for wedding ceremonies, receptions and events for 2021 and beyond and have 2 confirmed wedding ceremonies booked for September 2020 (with COVID restrictions)

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.

Post Room dispatched a total of 45,519 items of post

1,088 incoming documents scanned onto EDRMS - Overall scanning accuracy – 100 %

890 incoming Revs and Bens documents indexed in total - Overall indexing accuracy – 100%

3,734 incoming Revs and Bens e-mails indexed

927 planning letters e-mailed in by home workers – printed, enveloped and dispatched by Post Room

582 items of mail usually distributed to departments by Post Room trolley, scanned and e-mailed to departments by Post Room.

### **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.

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

**Councillor Brandon Eldred**  
**Cabinet Member for Finance**