



Cabinet Member Report for Finance

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 2nd November, 2020

Finance

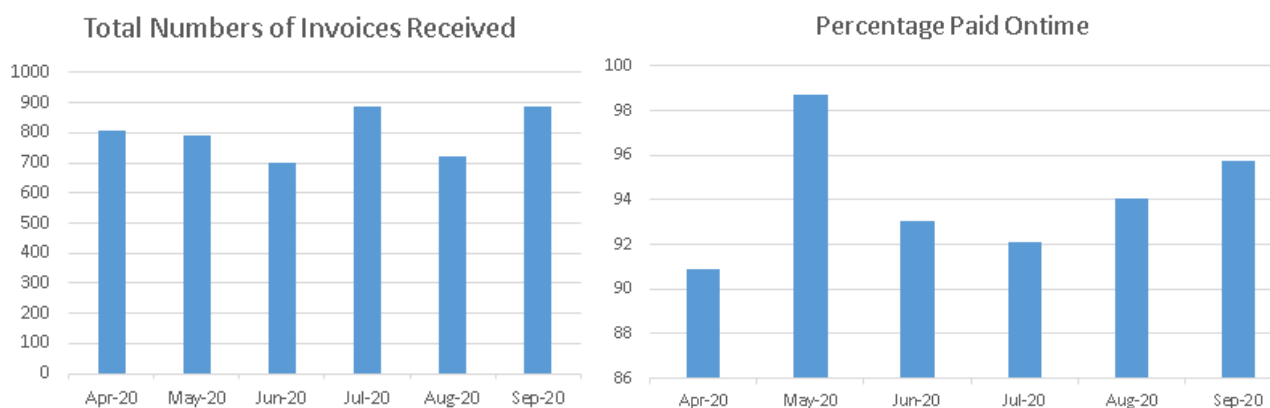
Our Auditors are due to recommence work on the 2018-19 Accounts this month. The draft Statement of Accounts for 2019-20 are due to go to Audit Committee on 26 October 2020 and be published afterwards. The Closedown Team and Finance Support is now provided by Northampton County Council following on from the changes to LGSS.

The new shadow authorities are commencing with their budget construction for 2021-22. 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. They will in particular provide data and information in respect of the elements that will be moving across from this council, based currently on our existing Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Cabinet received its last report on the current year budget in September and will receive the mid-year report at its meeting on 11 November 2020. Whilst the report is under construction as I write this update, I am certain that the forecast overspend will have reduced even further, as we become more confident in the grant support we should receive in respect of the loss of income from Fees and Charges.

NBC currently has £3.636M aged debt, a reduction of £635K 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.

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. 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 have now closed. Final applications have been processed and a reconciliation process has been issued by BEIS.

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

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.

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.

Councillor Brandon Eldred
Cabinet Member for Finance