



## Cabinet Member Report for Finance

### Northampton Borough Council

Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2021

#### Finance

A final Budget Monitoring Report will be provided to Cabinet on 3 March 2021, whilst the data and report are being refined, I am pleased to advise that it will reflect a further increase in this Council's underspend to around £250K.

Our Auditors have nearly completed their 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 budget is due to be approved soon and will also set the first Council Tax for West Northamptonshire Council.

Billing for National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR, better known as Business Rates). Has been suspended at the request of Government. We are hopeful that this requested delay will lead to some further relief for businesses impacted by the pandemic. For 2020-21 after the initial bills were issued, we were required to rebill a large proportion of businesses, to reflect the 100% relief given to all Retail, Hospitality and Leisure businesses, this meant providing relief of around £34M to local businesses.

In addition to this support, during the first lockdown we distributed over £36.3M in grants to over 3,700 businesses,

Since November 2020, we have distributed over 3,400 grants, some are multiple grants to individual businesses, due to the tiering and fortnightly review. However, this amounts to a further £9.1M having been distributed into our local economy and businesses, at this time of writing, with more being processed for payment each day.

We have sought through the Discretionary Funding to identify other sectors beyond pure Retail Hospitality and Leisure, to assist the next line back of warehouses and manufacturing and those businesses that have managed to remain open but are severely impacted. In particular, with this one-off funding we have run a scheme for Taxi Vehicle License holders, weighting the value awarded to those who have invested in greener vehicles.

Whilst there have been some media posts about do more, more quickly, we have had to identify schemes and processes never used before to identify businesses and distribute what equates to 3 times what we collect in Council Tax for this council in one year. At the same time to deliver an ever-growing requirement for data and analysis to Government Departments and seeking to avoid fraud.

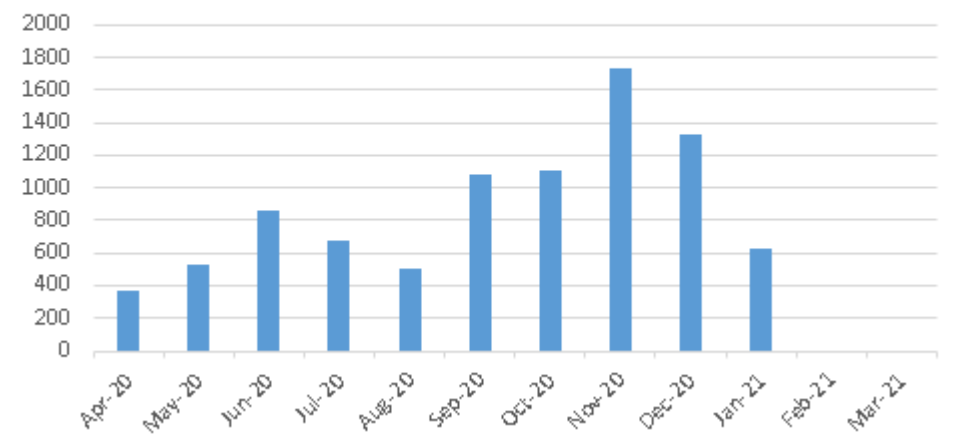
Our staff have worked incredibly hard, that like others have suffered illness through Covid, had to balance home schooling and work in an innovative manner.

NBC currently has £5.952M of aged debt, of which £2.755M is under 30 days.

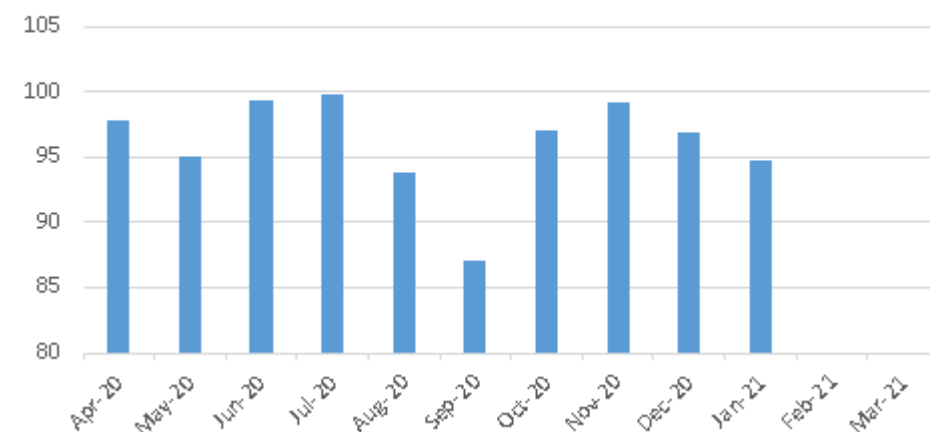
Although the Accounts Payable/Receivable Team have suffered from reduced resources as a result of the pandemic, along with major involvement with the creation of the new West Northants Council, they have delivered a good service and seek to pay invoices on time, despite the

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.

**Total Number of invoices recieved**



**% Paid ontime**



## 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. The reduction in value collected remains within initial forecast margins, but remains at a level that has not impacted on our cashflow, as we are obligated to pay the value of the precept set to the other organisations we collect for, regardless of whether we have collected the cash.

The movement of over 2,000 Council Tax payers from 10 instalments to 12, does appear to have assisted many, along with an increase of around a further 2,000 claimants for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme

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 that we anticipate being announced during the second half of February.

There are now in excess of 20 different schemes live and active with more due to go live soon. The challenge for the R&B Service and Finance, is ensuring the funds go out swiftly, but being able to reconcile each grant announced by Government, that means that Tier 3 and Tier 4 grants albeit in existence for just days, has to be treated as a separate scheme and accounted for as such.

The £500 Track and Trace payments continue to be awarded, however the Government criteria does highlight that these are hardship payments, intended for those on specific benefits or low incomes with limited savings.

## **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.

The core focus for teams now is to support the launch of the new Council. Be that Day One readiness or preparing for a structured handover and closure of Northampton Borough Council systems and accounts plus the novation of extant contracts and income streams.

## **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, they await with anticipation the opportunity to recommence services proper.

I would like to put on record my appreciation to Shelley Parker and her excellent team for all the hard work they have put in over the years to support events at the Guildhall, keep us as Councillors and our staff and contractors safe, particularly in the past year with Covid. They are an unseen team that just quietly delivers excellent services.

They have supported teams in mobilising to work from home, cleansed the offices (helping not only with hygiene, but also the Governance Closure by supporting archive cleansing and reducing storage in the offices), implemented a hybrid mail solution which has been of particular assistance in the current circumstances. The post room has worked tirelessly to ensure revised billing has been processed, incoming mail scanned and distributed.

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