



Cabinet Member Report for Finance

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 3rd June 2019

INTRODUCTION

As we have two councils this month, I will take this opportunity to look back at 2017-18. I would like to thank the officers and staff in my portfolio for their hard work and dedication during what have been unsettling times for staff, be they NBC or our support teams in LGSS. The finance teams have worked exceptionally hard supporting service areas, despite legacy issues which delayed the 2016-17 Accounts which were eventually signed off.

We as a Council took the decision to improve our income with a new form of Treasury investment with CCLA, which will see us benefit in 2019-20 from a new income stream worth in excess of £300K.

The Revenue and Benefit Service have improved collection rates, whilst maintaining our understanding approach to debt collection. In addition we have actively sought to signpost local businesses to the various Business Rate discount schemes and subsidies that we can offer.

During the year we brought back the role of Section 151 Officer from LGSS and I believe that has assisted in improving our Governance, along with the Management reorganisation led by our new CEO, and improved our ability to be more agile in our decision making.

FINANCE

The Finance Team are close to completing the Statement of Accounts for 2017-18 and making progress in respect of the closedown for 2018-19.

The final end of year budget position for 2018-19 will be considered at Cabinet on 12 June 2019, this continues to project an overspend.

We appointed our new Internal Auditors, BDO (Binder Dijker Otte) who are in the process of completing their audit cycle for 2018-19 and will be reporting formally to the next Audit Committee in July 2019.

We also saw the appointment of new external auditors, EY (Ernst & Young) who will replace KPMG fully, once the 2017-18 Statements of Accounts are completed.

REVENUES & BENEFITS

Main Billing Process - Staggered over a three week period, commencing on the 25th February, 115,000 bills, totalling £225m were successfully sent out for Business Rates, Business Improvement Districts, Council Tax and Housing Benefit notification letters.

Council Tax – The service continued to focus on collection throughout March with numerous initiatives to maximise payments. A significant shift in payment patterns to 12 monthly payments, allowed the service to exceed target by 0.12%, with an out-turn of 96.32%

Business Rates – The out-turn figure of 98.17% (target 97.50%) and is reflective of the processes and procedures that have been embedded since the transfer of the service back to Northampton.

Benefits – The service continued with the usual year end processes during March to ensure up-rates and rent increases were input prior to the new financial year. Teams have worked on initiatives to tackle potential subsidy loss and implementing the new Risk Based Verification procedure. This will improve the customer experience by making the process simpler and easier. End of year performance figures for New Claims 25.58 days (17/18 26.93) and Change of Circumstances 7.52 days (17/18 9.23) are both improvements on last year.

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE / RECEIVABLE

The target for Registering compliant Invoices for payment has been exceeded in 2018-19, the target is within 5 working days and the average for the year was 2.07 days. Despite year end pressures March performance was exceptionally good, invoices were being registered on average in less than a day. This was due to staff working extra hours to ensure that invoices were processed before the yearend deadline and work carried out with the corporate governance team focused attention on clearing outstanding invoices that staff had not GRN'd (Goods Receipted Notice).

FACILITIES

The facilities team have again in the past year worked hard to support staff, councillors and visitors and seek to contribute income to the costs of the Guildhall.

Numerous events have been successfully and safely hosted, with partners providing catering and hospitality services.

Community bookings hosted included; Food Fair, International Women's Day, Heritage Volunteers, Jobs Fair Ltd, Wedding s, Remembrance Service.

In terms of Service Performance, all invoices closed were closed, the basement was cleared with some items being successfully reused eg 10 chairs salvaged, Indexing accuracy – 99.76% Scanning accuracy – 100%, NPH electronic transfer of outgoing post went live in April.

Councillor Brandon Eldred
Cabinet Member for Finance