

FINANCE ISSUES

Revenue Monitoring report

Officers are in the process of drafting the latest budget monitoring report for 2021-22. As we go through the year a number of issues have emerged which are now included in the latest forecast position for 2021-22.

However, I am pleased to report that we contain to be able to contain those emerging pressures through the overall budget that was set back in February.

The detail budget monitoring report will be going to the additional Cabinet meeting set up in December to deal with the draft budget setting process for 2022-23.

Budget Setting

We are currently right in the middle of the detailed budget setting process. Cabinet and the Executive Leadership Team met on the 22 November to run through the latest position and to determine the potential service growth that should be included in the draft budget plans.

Officers are now working through the detail with a report on the draft budget due to be considered by Cabinet on 21 December. This will then commence full budget consultation on those proposals.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)

Councillors may well remember previous reports on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. We have to approve a local scheme each year to determine the level of Council Tax support to provide to residents in the area.

We proposed a scheme for 2022-23 which maintained the same level of support as the current scheme but also provide greater support to care leavers and war widows. We carried out a full consultation on the plan and received significant support for the proposals.

The consultation results were taken into account and Cabinet have recommended to Council the adoption of the scheme for 2022-23 as proposed which is elsewhere on the agenda.

Revenues and Benefits

Members may recall a Cabinet decision to move away from three different operating models inherited from the predecessor authorities and into one in-house structure with responsibility for dealing with all Revenues and Benefits issues across West Northamptonshire.

This involved winding up a standalone company in the South Northants area, moving away from the lead authority (ex-LGSS) arrangement that provided the service for the Northampton area and bringing across the in-house team that was in operation at Daventry.

Belinda Green, who is the Assistant Director responsible for Revenues and Benefits has set about this with some gusto and from the 8 November we now have one Revenues and Benefits service, delivered by an in-house team.

The performance inherited from the previous arrangements is not great and may worsen before it improves as the team and new culture settles in. However, it has been a great achievement to transform this service so quickly, deliver a financial saving and provide the foundations to deliver an improved revenues and benefits service going forward.

Predecessor Authority Accounts

A week or so before vesting day there were 10 sets of accounts outstanding from the predecessor authorities.

By the time we get to the full council meeting we expect there to be only four sets that remain outstanding.

The Audit and Governance Committee under the leadership of Cllr Irving-Swift has gone about its task to get the accounts closed in an enthusiastic but fastidious way. In fact, the meeting in September included four sets of predecessor accounts for the Committees approval and the agenda ran to 1,196 pages. An all time record for this Committee I am informed!

We are hoping that by the end of this financial year all of the predecessor accounts will have been approved and signed off by the external auditors. The progress towards that has certainly been pretty impressive so far.

Councillor Malcolm Longley
Cabinet Member for Finance