

.CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

28 March 2023

COUNCILLOR E SEWARD - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE & LEGAL

For the period February to March 2023

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

FINANCE

Budget 2023/24 and Forecast 2024/25 onwards

A balanced budget position for 2023/24 was presented to Full Council in February 2023. Work will continue during 2023/24 to address the future deficits.

Budget Monitoring P10 2022/23

The Budget monitoring statement P10 2022/23 was prepared and presented to Cabinet in March 2023. This predicted an improved position over the P6 Monitoring statement, however a full year deficit of £602,792 is still anticipated.

Internal Audit on Key Controls

The scheduled key controls audit has begun and is due to be completed during March. This annual audit reviews the key controls that feed into the Statement of Accounts and provides assurance to inform the Head of Internal Audit's annual report and opinion, and assist in the preparation of the Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS).

ASSETS

Planning application for the enabling land at Sheringham continues to progress through the due process with the purchaser providing a drainage strategy and ground investigation report. Determination anticipated.

Vacant Property– leases are progressing and expect to complete shortly for Former Tennis Courts and Collectors Cabin at North Lodge Park. A review of a small prom store is underway to establish viability for letting purposes. Report to Cabinet regarding the Seaview Premises at North Lodge Park, Cromer subject to the meeting on 6th October (has been presented and a lease proposal has been agreed)

Improvement works and marketing of The Cedars, North Walsham premises continues. Marketing for vacant premises at Cornish Way and Catfield are underway with strong interest from potential tenants.

Decarbonisation (and other capital works) are underway at Cornish Way and works now completed at Sheringham Little Theatre.

LEGAL

A number of litigation matters are moving forward at various stages, including a planning enforcement prosecution and two health and safety prosecutions, with others in the pipeline. Eastlaw is quickly approaching the end of its contracted period with a local authority client and preparations are underway to ensure a smooth transition and explore new opportunities.

The two Independent Persons with reference to Standards and the Localism Act, having been appointed, have received induction training from the Monitoring Officer and have attended an external Independent Person workshop.

Information Requests

FOI request figures show that the Council's current performance at responding to requests within the statutory 20 working days is at 96%. The national target is set at 90%. The legal service continues to provide advice and assistance to the wider Council in order to assist in this area and support the corporate responsibilities.

Corporate customer services training on the Customer Services Strategy.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The team continues to be very busy supporting committee meetings, with several additional meetings having been arranged in recent weeks. In addition, preparation continues for the Member Induction in May 2023. Most of the training schedule is now in place and work is underway on preparing supporting information.

The Youth Council held its inaugural meeting on 23rd February. There are now 12 members and they agreed to meet remotely on a monthly basis. It is hoped that an in-person workshop can take place in the summer.

The next meeting will take place in late March and key roles will be agreed, along with a work programme for the coming months.

On 27th February a meeting of the Domestic Abuse Forum took place, chaired by Cllr W Fredericks. Representatives from a huge number of agencies attended, including CAF/CASS and information and feedback was shared and several actions were agreed. It is hoped that the Forum will meet again in late April.

REVENUES

Collection as of 28 February 2023.

Council Tax collection was 94.23% against target of 94.20% with a minor increase in collection of £25k.

NDR collection is 95.72% against target of 95.35%, an excess in collection of £92k.

Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme.

The total rebate amount awarded to NNDC council tax customers is £6,114,900.

The Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding (EBSS AF)

This scheme is aimed at providing support to households not eligible for the automatic [Energy Bills Support Scheme GB](#) (£400 payment paid by energy suppliers).

The Energy Bills Support Scheme - Alternative Funding is now live to applications and the application form can be found at the following link [Apply for energy bill support if you do not get it automatically - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

All applications for this scheme must be made through the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) via the above government website however we have added details to help customers at [Home | Energy bills rebate \(north-norfolk.gov.uk\)](#) including details of the help line telephone number and email address which are as follows:

Email: alternativefunding@ebss.beis.gov.uk

Telephone: 0808 175 3287

Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

Alternative Fuel Payment (AFP)

This scheme is where payments are made of £200 to support households that use fuels other than gas to heat their homes

The above two schemes are different to others NNDC has managed previously because the government has set up a single application form on gov.uk which will centralise as much of the data gathering and validation as possible. The Government will then share applications with us where we will need to verify applicants' addresses once, they have passed through the application portal and to transfer the relevant support payment to successful applicants.

Risk and Performance Audit being undertaken.

Council Tax and Non-Domestic (Business) Rates Annual Billing – all annual bills and benefits have been sent for the 2023/24 year.

NNDR includes new NDR reliefs and the **VOA NDR Revaluation 2023 List** has been released as announced by the chancellor, tested by us and is part of the year-end/annual billing work.

Revenues team representatives attended the following meetings:

Norfolk Fraud Hub Meeting 15 March 2023

Enforcement Board Meeting 28 February 2023

Revenues staff meeting 1 March 2023

Year-End/Annual billing meeting 22 February 2023

EBSS-AF Scheme Meeting 15 March 2023

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

FINANCE

2020/21 Statement of Accounts

The Final position for 2020/21 is nearing completion and should be signed off by Ernst Young by the end of March 2023.

2021/22 Preparation of Statement of Accounts

Work is almost completed on the outstanding entries relating to the 2021/22 Outturn, this will enable the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts to be completed and audit work scheduled.

2022/23 Outturn/Budget Monitoring P12

Due to the implementation of the new Finance system in December 2022, year end processes have changed significantly, the team are working on comprehensive guidance notes to support managers through these changes. The revenue and capital position continues to be monitored to ensure that income/expenditure is accurately accounted for.

System Implementation and Phase two

The implementation of the new financial management system was divided into two phases, Phase two timelines and resourcing are to be confirmed. Phase two includes additional budgeting functionality and an Asset management module.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Democratic Services

Work is ongoing for the production of a dedicated web page for Town & Parish Councils. Several teams from across the Council are involved in collating key information and it is hoped to be able to launch it in time for the local elections in May.

REVENUES

Ongoing internal training of two Level 3 Business Certificated apprentices. Previous one was National Apprentice of the Year that met the DWP Minister on his visit to NNDC.

Online forms - reviewing and improving most commonly used customer paper forms.

Enforcement work of reviewing and improving the process to build on the softer approach set up during the pandemic.

Government Returns:

NNDR3

QRC4 for council tax and NNDR

3 Meetings attended
