

TITLE OF REPORT: SECOND QUARTER REVENUE MONITORING 2014/15

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, POLICY & GOVERNANCE
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR T.W. HONE

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the summary position on General Fund income and expenditure for the period July to September 2014.
- 1.2 This report will highlight significant variances (+/- £25K or +/- 25%) on the working budget with explanations and impact upon next year's base budget.
- 1.3 The report also highlights, with the use of a traffic light system, the position with regard to the carry forward balances and efficiencies approved for the year.
- 1.4 Key items that greatly influence the 'financial health' of the Council are monitored and reported here as key Corporate Health indicators.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet is requested to ask any questions which may arise from the report's contents and note this report.
- 2.2 Cabinet is requested to approve the changes to the 2014/15 General Fund budget identified in paragraph 8.1, table 1, a £111k decrease in net expenditure.
- 2.3 Cabinet is requested to approve the changes to the 2015/16 General Fund budget identified in paragraph 8.1, table 1, a £56k increase in net expenditure.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are able to monitor and request appropriate action of Directorates who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.
- 3.2 Changes to the Council's balances are monitored and approved.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Budget holders have considered the options to live within the existing budget but consider the variances reported here necessary and appropriate.

5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 5.1 Consultation on the budget monitoring is not required. Members will be aware that there is wider consultation on budget estimates during the corporate business planning process each year.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This Report does contain a recommendation on a key decision that was first included in the Forward Plan on 30 June 2014.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 Members approved the General Fund 2014/15 estimates in February 2014 and approved General Fund net expenditure of £15.636million. In addition to the 2014/15 original budget, Members subsequently approved carry forward budgets of £351k and a net increase to the base budget of £127k. These were approved at the March and June meetings of Cabinet. The total working budget for 2014/15 was, therefore, £16.114million.
- 7.2 The 2014/15 General Fund estimates included efficiency proposals of £1.514million, an amount of £150k for growth pressures and an investment proposal of £20k agreed as part of the Corporate Business Planning process. An allowance of £1.2million was put aside in reserves for known financial risks following an assessment of the risk register.
- 7.3 At 1st Qtr the projected net expenditure on the General Fund was estimated to be £16.097million, this was a net decrease on the working budget of £17k. A £74k decrease to the base budget for 2015/16 was also reported. Since the 1st Qtr budget was approved an additional adjustment to the budget was agreed at full council on the 24 July 2014. An additional £10k was approved for Churchgate procurement advice. This increased the working budget to £16.107million.

8. ISSUES

Executive Summary

Issue & Relevant Table	Comment
Net general fund expenditure for 2014/15 (Table 1)	Forecast net expenditure at 2nd Qtr is £15.996million. This is a £111k (or 0.7%) decrease in the working budget and is £360k (or 2.3%) higher than the original budget.
Budgets Carried Forward from 2013/14 (Table 2)	Of the £351k of Budgets carried forward into 2014/15 £116k (33%) has been spent by the end of the second quarter. There are two carry forwards at amber status that may not be spent by the end of the year.
Achievement of Efficiencies (Table 3)	It is expected that £1.510million of the agreed efficiency proposals will be achieved (99%).
Key Financial Indicators (Table 4)	One indicator is at amber status, the rest are green status.
General Fund Reserve Balance (Table 5)	The general fund reserve is now forecast to have a balance of £4.7million at 31 March 2015. This is

Issue & Relevant Table	Comment
	£2.7million higher than the originally approved minimum balance of £2million.
Allowance for financial risks (Table 6)	The budgeted minimum general fund balance of £2million included an allowance of £1.2million for known financial risks. As at the end of the second quarter £139k of these risks had been realised.
Earmarked Reserves (Table 7)	As at 1 April 2014 there was a balance of £4million in other useable earmarked reserves. The balance is forecast to be £4.3million at 31 March 2015.
Funding of Net Expenditure (Table 8)	A net total of £2.495million is anticipated to be receivable in the general fund with regard to Business Rates. This is slightly lower (£15k) than the budgeted amount of £2.510million.

General Fund – Income and Expenditure

- 8.1 The projected expenditure on the General Fund is now estimated to be £15.996million. This is a net decrease of £111k on the working budget of £16.107million. The significant changes (+/- £25K or +/- 25% of the working budget) to the General Fund expenditure are detailed in table 1. There is an increase in estimated spend in 2015/16 of £56k as a result of the on-going impact of the variances reported in 2014/15.

Table 1: Significant changes to the General Fund

Expenditure/ Income	Working Budget £'000	Revised Estimate £'000	Increase / Decrease(-) £'000	Comment	Effect on 2015/16 Budget £'000
Planning Control					
- Fees and charges	-468	-667	-199	Planning income overachieved. A number of major applications have been received which attract a large fee, these include solar farm applications. The 2015/16 budget has not been adjusted due to a lack of known major applications to come forward and the fact that future income depends on the progress of the local plan.	
- Recoverable legal fees	-10	-5	+5	Legal fees incurred in the process of obtaining Unilateral Undertakings and S106 agreements can sometimes be recovered. The number of agreements has fallen and from next April the Council will not be able to charge on UU's, due to the new Community Levy Infrastructure legislation. Will receive a minimal amount of income in 2015/16.	+5
	-478	-672	-194		
Vacancy Control	-237	-136	+100	The vacancy control savings target will be underachieved by £100k. This is due to a reduced number of vacancies being held in the staff establishment. The target	

Expenditure/ Income	Working Budget £'000	Revised Estimate £'000	Increase / Decrease(-) £'000	Comment	Effect on 2015/16 Budget £'000
				for 15/16 is being reviewed and will be adjusted as part of the budget setting process.	
Burials Service: Interment Income	-146	-116	+30	Reduction in income due to the apparent change in preference towards the interment of ashes rather than a traditional burial. The fee charged for interment of ashes is significantly lower than that for a traditional burial. Restricted capacity at Baldock, Hitchin and Royston has limited the scope for new grave purchases, with a knock-on effect on income related to monuments.	+30
Purchase of Graves Income	-116	-91	+25		+25
Monuments & Inscriptions Income	<u>-49</u>	<u>-44</u>	<u>+5</u>		<u>+5</u>
	<u>-311</u>	<u>-251</u>	<u>+60</u>		<u>+60</u>
Parking Services: Off Street Car Parking – RingGo Income	-49	-62	-13	The use of “RingGo” (pay by phone) as a method of payment for parking has increased in recent years.	-13
Off Street – Parking machine Income	-1,371	-1,348	+23	The income budget for 14/15 included an additional £157k to be achieved in year from an introduction of a new tariff structure. At Qtr 1 the income forecast was reduced by £18k on the basis that the structure would be in place by October 14. Implementation has been delayed further and is unlikely to be in place until January 2015. The financial impact has been partially mitigated by a 7% increase in parking income for the year to date compared to the same period last year.	
On Street – Penalty Charge Notices	<u>-265</u>	<u>-315</u>	<u>-50</u>	The increase in the projected budget reflects the greater than budgeted level of PCN income for the first half of the year. PCN income to date is, however, 19% lower than that recorded for the equivalent period in 13/14, indicating that greater CEO numbers and more efficient deployment over the past 18 months have influenced motorists behaviour and acted as a deterrent to the breaching of road safety orders. As such, no assumption is made that the overachievement of income will	
	-1,685	-1,725	-40		

Expenditure/ Income	Working Budget £'000	Revised Estimate £'000	Increase / Decrease(-) £'000	Comment	Effect on 2015/16 Budget £'000
				continue in the second half of the financial year and the situation remains under review.	
Careline Maintenance -	+138	+122	-16	Underspend is partly the result of an upgrade to the call handling system and partly due to the loss of a contract and hence the corresponding reduction in maintenance charges. The contract may be renewed again in 2015/16 so no on-going budget adjustment at this stage.	
Homelessness Initiatives					
B&B Payments	+11k	+37	+26	Increase in spend due to the long term use of temporary accommodation in Bed and Breakfasts as an alternative when there are difficulties in accessing the private rented sector. The equivalent total spend for 2013/14 was £16k.	
Grants, reimbursements and contributions	-11	-37	-26	Net cost to the council is zero as North Hertfordshire can claim housing benefit for the B&B cost.	
Homelessness Grant Payments	+16	+46	+30	A grant was awarded to North Hertfordshire from the DCLG for single homelessness projects. The grant has been given to North Herts Sanctuary for a support officer and rent deposit scheme.	
Government Grants	0	-30	-30	Grant from DCLG for single homelessness projects. Grant has been spent on above project.	
			-89		+52
Other minor variances			-22		+4
Total change in General Fund expenditure			-111		+56

Carry Forward of Budgets from 2013/14 to 2014/15

- 8.2 There are a total of £351k of budgets carried forward from 2013/14 into 2014/15. As at the end of the second quarter £116k of these budgets had been spent.
- 8.3 A condition of carry forwards is that there is a clear plan for spending the budget. The carry forward budgets are given a traffic light code to signify whether there is a problem with spending or completing the project within the timeframe. There are two carry forwards at amber status and the remainder are at green status, at the end of September 2014. This indicates there are two carry forward budgets that are still anticipated will be spent but there is a risk this may not be achieved in the normal timeframe.

Table 2 - Progress of carry forward budgets

Carry Forward	Amber/ Red	Budget £'000	Projected Variance £'000	Explanation
Area Committee Budgets	A	79	0	£18k of carried forward funds from 2013/14 has now been released. The majority of the remaining balance of carry forwards relate to committed funds within the Hitchin, Southern Rural and Baldock Area Committee budgets. The Chairs & Members of each Committee during the September cycle of area meetings were advised accordingly as to the possible utilisation / release or reallocation of such funds, prior to any new allocations being awarded from each of the Committees' respective 2014/15 Base Budget. The matter was also reviewed at the Area Chairs & Vice Chairs meeting on 09/10/14.
Extending boundary of Chiltern Area of Natural Beauty	A	20	0	The decision on whether this work takes place is with Natural England, the application has been submitted by the Chilterns Conservation Board on behalf of North Hertfordshire and the Board is waiting to hear their decision on whether the application has been successful. Officers will continue to track progress and engage positively with the Chilterns Conservation Board and Natural England on how this proposal is progressed. It is likely that this will need to be carried forward again to 2015/16 if Natural England does not process the application this financial year.

Efficiency Proposals Incorporated in the 2014/15 Budget

8.4 A total of £1.514million of proposals were approved within the 2014/15 budget. As at the end of the second quarter it is anticipated £1.510million (or 99%) will be achieved in 2014/15. This is summarised in table 3. The overall net underachievement of £4k is made up of a number of offsetting variances. . The on going impact on future years is anticipated to be £12k.

Table 3: Summary of all 2014/15 efficiency proposals

	Original Budgeted Saving in 2014/15	Projected Saving as at end of 2 nd Qtr	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Expenditure Reduction:			
Staff structure changes	149	124	+25
Hitchin Leisure Management Contract	156	163	-7
Letchworth Leisure Management Contract	500	500	0
Market contracts	57	57	0
Reduction in investment in Area Wide	65	65	0

Parking Reviews			
Acquisition of District Council Offices	208	208	0
Temporary closure of Museums	55	55	0
New Cleaning Contract/ Revised Royston Town Hall Agreement	50	55	-5
Reduction in grant to Parish Councils for Council Tax Reduction Scheme	11	11	0
Other	6	6	0
Sub-total	1,257	1,244	+13
Income Generation:			
Collection of income for penalty charge notices	100	150	-50
Increase in parking income following review of tariffs.	157	116	+41
Grand Total	1,514	1,510	+4

Key Corporate 'Financial Health' Indicators

8.5 There are 5 key corporate 'financial health' indicators identified and listed in table 4 below. These indicators reflect specific aspects of the budget which have a significant impact on the overall Council's net budget and are likely to be influenced by changes in the external environment. Activity data of these indicators is maintained on the Council's performance system, Covalent.

Table 4 – Key Corporate 'Health' Indicators

Indicator	2013/14 Actual April – September	Original Budget £'000	Working Budget £'000	Actual to date £'000	Projected Variance to Original Budget £'000
Building Control Fees – Green	-182	-351	-351	-175	0
Planning Application Fees - Green	-336	-431	-612	-396	-181
Land Charges - Green	-131	-167	-178	-119	-11
Car Parking Fees - Amber	-671	-1,466	-1,410	-711	+56
Parking Penalty Charge Notices - Green	-301	-410	-460	-281	-50

8.6 The number of building control fee earning applications are slightly up on the same period last year (426 in 2014/15 compared to 418 in 2013/14) but is less than 2012/13 and prior years, while the number of non-fee earning applications has continued to increase (4,143 in 2014/15 compared to 3,884 in 2013/14). The projected income budget has not been adjusted.

8.7 The number of development control fee earning applications are also up on the same period last year (787 in 2014/15 compared to 712 in 2013/14) and the number of non-fee earning applications are also higher (599 in 2014/15 compared to 493 in 2013/14). The income budget has been increased at Qtr2 as reported in Table 1.

8.8 The number of local land charges searches completed in the second quarter was greater than the same period in the last two years. For example, the number of full residential searches was 1,032 compared to 990 in 2013/14 and 834 in 2012/13. Table 4 however shows that the income generated is less than this time last year; this is due

to fees being reduced to try and eliminate any surplus in the service area. The amount of income received is still ahead of profile due to increased demand.

- 8.9 The number of car park tickets purchased in the second quarter is higher than the past two years in each of the towns:
 Hitchin: 346,509 (332,778 in 2013/14)
 Letchworth: 111,778 (111,706 in 2013/14)
 Royston: 148,708 (135,568 in 2013/14)
- 8.10 The number of penalty charge notices issued for car parking was 7,199 in the second quarter of 2014/15. This compares to 7,619 in the same quarter of 2013/14 and 4,183 in 2012/13.

General Fund Balances Projected for 2014/15

- 8.11 The revision to the 2014/15 working budget of General Fund projected net expenditure will result in a decrease of £111k in expenditure during the year and hence an increase in the year end balances available for general fund purposes.
- 8.12 Two known financial risks have been realised in the second quarter resulting in additional unbudgeted expenditure of £113k. These were in respect of costs incurred in the process of travellers eviction and clear up and the projected underachievement of the vacancy control savings target. A summary of the transactions to the projected year end general fund balance is shown in table 5 and the realisation of known financial risks is shown in table 6. The projected general fund balance is in excess of the minimum balance of £2million approved by Council in February.

Table 5: Projected General Fund Balances

Projected General Fund Balances	£'000
Balance Brought Forward (1/4/2014)	3,932cr
Projected Net Spend (including precepts)	16,995dr
Precept Receipts & Government Grants	17,748cr
Contribution to/from Special Reserve	25dr
Balance Carried Forward (31/3/2014)	4,660cr

Table 6: Known Financial Risks

	£'000
Original allowance for known financial risks	1,200cr
Known financial risks realised in quarter 1	26dr
Known financial risks realised in quarter 2	113dr
Remaining allowance for known financial risks	1,061cr

Earmarked Reserves

- 8.13 The Council has a number of earmarked reserves which can be used to fund revenue expenditure; these are detailed in Table 7. A total of £1,222k is projected to be contributed to the reserves in 2014/15 and a total of £938k is expected to be used to fund expenditure. This will leave a projected amount in earmarked reserves at 31 March 2015 of £4.286million. A significant element of the contribution to reserves in

2014/15 will be the section 31 grant from government for compensation of business rate reliefs (see para 8.16 below). A new earmarked reserve has been set up at Qtr2 for a waste reserve with projected contribution of £211k. This contribution is coming from the AFM funds to help mitigate potential future risks in the waste service for example the potential construction of the Northern Transfer Station.

Table 7 – Earmarked Reserves 2014/15

	Balance at 1 April 2014 £'000	Contributions £'000	Payments to Fund expenditure £'000	Balance at 31 March 2015 £'000
Special Reserve	1,767cr	0	25dr	1,742cr
Housing Planning Delivery Reserve	243cr	34cr	116dr	161cr
Information Technology Reserve	293cr	0	146dr	147cr
Environmental Warranty Reserve	209cr	0	0	209cr
Performance Reward Grant Reserve	50cr	0	50dr	0
Insurance Reserve	28cr	0	0	28cr
Cemetery Mausoleum	96cr	4cr	0	100cr
S106 Monitoring	88cr	15cr	15dr	88cr
Homelessness	28cr	0	28dr	0
Building Control Reserve	0	0	0	0
DWP Additional Grants	27cr	27cr	53dr	1cr
Climate Change Grant	53cr	0	0	53cr
Museum Exhibits Reserve	13cr	0	0	13cr
Property Maintenance	28cr	10cr	0	38cr
Paintings Conservation	13cr	0	0	13cr
Childrens Services	7cr	0	7dr	0
Hitchin Museum Donations	0	0	0	0
Leisure Management Reserve	49cr	20cr	0	69cr
Town Wide Review	180cr	0	28dr	152cr
Town Centre Maintenance	31cr	8cr	0	39cr
Street Name Plates	4cr	0	4dr	0
Community Right to Bid	29cr	16cr	0	45cr
Street Furniture	4cr	0	4dr	0
Office Move IT Works	7cr	0	7dr	0
Local Authority Mortgage Scheme	31cr	25cr	0	56cr
DCLG Grants	492cr	852cr	445dr	899cr
Growth Area Fund	53cr	0	0	53cr
Community Development	1cr	0	1dr	0
Personal Search Fees	152cr	0	0	152cr
Electoral Services	9cr	0	9dr	0
Taxi Licences Reserve	17cr	0	0	17cr
Waste Reserve	0	211cr	0	211cr
Total Revenue Reserves	4,002cr	1,222cr	938dr	4,286cr

Funding of Net Expenditure

8.14 The Council's general fund net expenditure is funded by the Council Tax precept, revenue support grant, new homes bonus and the retained business rates. These were budgeted as follows:

Funding Source	2014/15 Original Estimate £'000	%
Revenue Support Grant	2,760	16%
Retained Business Rates	2,510	15%

New Homes Bonus	1,982	12%
Council Tax Precept	9,590	57%
Total Funding	16,842	100%

- 8.15 The revenue support grant and new homes bonus received should be consistent with the numbers above and should not change during the year. However, funding from council tax and business rates is dependent on the overall collection rates and in the case of business rates is dependent on the amount of appeals that are ultimately successful. Council Tax and Business Rates are accounted for separately in the Collection Fund. The Council had a £742k share of the collection fund deficit position at the 31 March 2014 and will have to budget to make a contribution from the general fund to the collection fund in 2015/16 to make good this deficit.
- 8.16 Over the past year the Government has announced a number of business rate relief measures and has announced that compensation will be provided to local authorities for the loss of income. This compensation will come in the form of a section 31 grant and will be payable direct to the general fund, rather than into the Collection Fund. The Council received a section 31 grant of £444k in 2013/14 in compensation for the small business rate relief scheme. This was transferred to an earmarked reserve and will be used to partly offset the levy repayment in 2014/15. The Council will receive a further £770k in 2014/15 for the following measures which will also be initially transferred to an earmarked reserve to help cover the deficit on the Collection Fund:
- 2% cap in the inflation increase for 2014/15
 - Doubling of small business rate relief
 - Relaxation of the small business rate relief second property rules
 - £1,000 retail relief
 - Reoccupation relief, and
 - Empty new build measure
- 8.17 The collection fund is anticipated to move further into deficit in relation to business rates in 2014/15, mainly as a result of successful appeals. However, the collection fund is anticipated to move further into surplus in relation to council tax. This is demonstrated in table 8 below. After the payment of a levy and receipt of the S31 grant is considered the Council will have retained a net total of £2.495million of business rates in the general fund in 2014/15. This is just £15k less than budgeted. The general fund will need to make good the Council's share of any deficit position over time. The forecasted net deficit on business rates of £1million will be largely mitigated by the availability of £770k of grant, as detailed in 8.16.

Table 8: Collection Fund Monitoring

	Business Rates		Council Tax	
	2013/14	2014/15	2013/14	2014/15
Collection Rate of in year debt as at September	59.86%	56.63%	57.75%	57.88%
Forecast year end share of (Surplus) / Deficit	£797,000	£1,000,000	(£53,000)	(£84,000)
Net Retained Business Rates in the General Fund	£2,592,000	£2,495,000		

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Cabinet has a responsibility to keep under review the budget of the Council and any other matter having substantial implications for the financial resources of the Council. By considering monitoring reports throughout the financial year Cabinet is

able to make informed recommendations on the budget to Council. The Council is under a duty to maintain a balanced budget and to maintain a prudent balance

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Members have been advised of any variations from the budgets in the body of this report and of any action taken by officers.
- 10.2 The projected general fund balance of £4.674million meets the recommended minimum balance of General Fund reserves agreed when the budget was set and is consistent with the planned intention to increase balances in the short term in order to allow a lead in time for the delivery of projects needed to balance the budget over the medium to longer term. The minimum balance for 2014/15 contains a 5% tolerance on original net expenditure for unknown risks and an allowance of £1.2million for identified key financial risks which had a total potential risk value of £6.2million.
- 10.3 A group of Property Search Companies are seeking to claim refunds of fees paid to the Council to access land charges data. Proceedings have not yet been issued. The Council has been informed that the value of those claims at present is £192,685 plus interest and costs. The claimants have also intimated that they may bring a claim against all English and Welsh local authorities for alleged anti-competitive behaviour. It is not clear what the value of any such claim would be against the Council. It is possible that additional claimants may come forward to submit claims for refunds, but none have been intimated at present. The Council has put aside funds of £152,000 as at 31 March 2014 in an earmarked reserve and has also made allowance in the general fund balance by identifying this issue as a financial risk.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 As outlined in the body of the report. The process of quarterly monitoring to Cabinet is a control mechanism to help to mitigate against the risk of an unplanned overspend of the overall Council budget.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1 October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5 April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 12.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 12.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.3 For any individual new revenue investment proposal of £50k or more, or affecting more than two wards, a brief equality analysis is required to be carried out to demonstrate that the authority has taken full account of any negative, or positive, equalities implications; this will take place following agreement of the investment.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraphs 12. Any individual award of a public service contract will be evaluated in terms of its social value through the Council's procurement processes.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 Although there are no direct human resource implications at this stage, care is taken to ensure that where efficiency proposals or service reviews may effect staff, appropriate communication and consultation is provided in line with HR policy.

15. APPENDICES

- 15.1 Appendix A - General Fund Summary

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

Report Writer:

- 16.1 Jodie Penfold, Group Accountant, Tel 474332, email, jodie.penfold@north-herts.gov.uk

Contributors:

- 16.2 Tim Neill, Accountancy Manager, Tel 474461, email, tim.neill@north-herts.gov.uk

- 16.3 Norma Atlay, Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance, Tel 474297,
email, norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk

- 16.3 Andrew Cavanagh, Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Mngt, Tel 474243,
email andrew.cavanagh@north-herts.gov.uk

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1 Estimate Book 2014/15 [Budget Book 2014/15](#)
17.2 Statement of Accounts 2013/14 [Statement of Accounts](#)