

CABINET
21 September 2021

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: FIRST QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2021/22

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND IT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: BE A MORE WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE AND EFFICIENT COUNCIL

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the summary position on revenue income and expenditure forecasts for the financial year 2021/22, as at the end of the first quarter. The forecast variance is a £560k increase on the net working budget of £18.801million, with an ongoing impact in future years of a £175k increase and requests to carry forward budget totalling £51k to fund specific projects in 2022/23. Within these summary totals there are a number of budget areas with more significant variances, which are detailed and explained in table 3.
- 1.2. The forecasts in the report are based on a prudent assessment of the continuing impacts of Covid-19. The position relating to support for our leisure centres is being kept under monthly review. Current forecasts are that spend will be within the support budget that has been set, but historically the summer period does see a drop in income and usage. Therefore, at this stage no variance has been reported. The full-year parking income forecasts (as detailed in table 5) are very prudent and reflect the uncertainty over ongoing Town Centre recovery.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That Cabinet note this report.
- 2.2. That Cabinet approves the changes to the 2021/22 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £560k increase in net expenditure.
- 2.3. That Cabinet notes the changes to the 2022/23 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £226k increase in net expenditure. These will be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2022/23.
- 2.4. That Cabinet delegates to the Service Director: Resources (in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT) authority to enter in to a Business Rate Pooling arrangement (if available) if it is estimated that it will be in the financial interests of the Council.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

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

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. Consultation on the budget monitoring report 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. The report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 22nd June 2021.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. Council approved the revenue budget for 2021/22 of £18.441million in February 2021. As at the end of Quarter One, the working budget has increased to £18.801million. Table 1 below details the approved changes to this budget to get to the current working budget:

Table 1 - Current Working Budget

	£k
Original Revenue Budget for 2021/22 approved by Full Council	18,441
Quarter 3 2020/21 Revenue Budget Monitoring report – 2021/22 budget changes approved by Cabinet (March 2021)	(17)
2020/21 Revenue Budget Outturn Report – 2021/22 budget changes approved by Cabinet (June 2021)	377
Current Working Budget	18,801

- 7.2. The Council is managed under Service Directorates. Table 2 below confirms the current net direct resource allocation of each Service Directorate and how this has changed from the original budget allocations approved by Council in February 2021.

Table 2 – Service Directorate Budget Allocations

Service Directorate	Original Budget 2021/22	Changes approved at Q3 2020/21	Changes approved at Outturn 2020/21	Other Budget Transfers	Current Net Direct Working Budget
	£k	£k	£k	£k	£k
Managing Director	1,910	0	324	0	2,234
Commercialisation	(285)	6	12	0	(267)
Customers	3,831	0	45	21	3,897
Legal & Community	2,201	38	4	(11)	2,232
Place	6,981	(81)	(8)	0	6,892
Regulatory Services	1,186	20	0	(10)	1,196
Resources	2,617	0	0	0	2,617
TOTAL	18,441	(17)	377	0	18,801

7.3. The Council's accounts for 2020/21 remain subject to review by External Audit. Subsequent to the presentation of the Revenue Outturn 2020/21 report to Cabinet in June, several relatively minor adjustments were identified prior to the publication of the NHDC Draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 at the end of July. The outcome of those adjustments was a revised General Fund balance at the end of the 2020/21 financial year of £8.865m, a reduction of £28k from the closing balance of £8.883m published in the Outturn Report. In addition, the net contribution to Earmarked Reserves was reduced by £50k from £11.464m, as detailed in the Outturn Report, to £11.414m. This followed subsequent notification from Government of a change to the formula for the calculation of the eligible NNDR Income Guarantee amount for 20/21 (reducing the income amount transferred to reserve by £27k) and notification from Herts County Council of the £23k levy contribution required to the Business Rates Pool for 2020/21 (transferred from reserve to fund the accrued cost). The Council's External Auditors have communicated that they plan to commence the Final Accounts audit in November. Further changes to the General Fund balance may therefore arise as a result of the audit.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. Service Managers are responsible for monitoring their expenditure and income against their working budget. Table 3 below highlights those areas where there are forecast to be differences. An explanation is provided for each of the most significant variances, which are generally more than £25k. The final columns detail if there is expected to be an impact on next year's (2022/23) budget:

Table 3 - Summary of significant variances

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2022/23 £k
Investments Interest Income	(103)	(40)	+63	It was necessary to seek approval from Cabinet on the procurement process to be followed in relation to the planned investment in Property / Multi-Asset Funds. It is now anticipated that the investment will be made around the end of the current financial year. The Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury), upon which the income budget is based, had estimated associated interest returns from the start of 2021/22. Given this is a long-term investment the focus has to be on long-term returns and getting the right investments. The resulting variance has been partially offset by cash balances available for investment being higher than originally anticipated, primarily due to the reprofiling of planned capital expenditure.	0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2022/23 £k
Hitchin Town Hall Community Facility Net Cost	173	198	+25	The forecast net variance represents the additional losses incurred for the first quarter only. Hitchin Town Hall was unable to open for large events until 19th July, due to Covid-19 restrictions, and as a venue that predominantly hosts larger events, this had a major impact on income. Even prior to this, fitness classes and smaller meetings were not able to take place until 17th May, which meant much of the first two months of trading in this financial year were lost entirely. There is still expected to be a lag in demand while events resume and public confidence in leisure and hospitality is restored. There have been some corresponding savings on expenditure, with less bar stock and other costs associated with running events not required.	0	0
Artificial Intelligence (AI) Software Licenses	35	24	(11)	The approved revenue investment allocation of £35k for AI software was carried forward at the end of 2020/21. The first year's software licenses have now been procured at a cost of £24k and a carry forward of £11k is requested to contribute to the second year's license fee.	11	0
Temporary Accommodation Net Cost	60	220	+160	The forecast outturn indicates the cost of nightly paid placements for homeless households. The focus on 'move-on' and resettlement has reduced the number of homeless household nightly placements, which are mostly in hotels, from a peak of 67 in May to 28 at the end of June. As most of the homeless households qualify for housing benefit, much of the additional cost to the Council relates to the estimated shortfall in Housing Benefit Subsidy, with housing benefit payments in respect of temporary accommodation not eligible for full reimbursement through the subsidy.	0	0
Domestic Waste & Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract Expenditure	5,161	5,337	+176	Overspend variance follows the calculation of the contract indexation for 2021/22. The budget for 21/22 assumed a contract indexation of 0.4%, based on the respective indices at that time. Due to subsequent increases in the fuel price index and the Consumer Price Inflation index, the calculation of the actual indexation rate for 21/22, as defined in the terms of the contract, has resulted in an increase to contract prices of 3.8%.	0	176

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2022/23 £k
Commercial Waste and Recycling Services				Following the easing of COVID restrictions most customers have begun trading again, however some have ceased trading. Of those customers who have resubscribed to the service, there has been a rationalisation of the services used, such as reduced frequency of collections, reduction in the number of bins and / or bin sizes. The estimated income impact is partially offset by a projected reduction in tipping charges, from the lower levels of waste collected, and lower contract costs from the lower level of activity.		
Tipping Charges	326	314	(12)		0	(12)
Contract Expenditure	153	137	(16)		0	(16)
Income from Customers	(1,134)	(1,074)	+60		0	60
Net Total	(655)	(623)	+32		0	32
Waste Awareness and Minimisation (AFM Funded)				Based on in-year forecasts provided by Herts County Council, no income receipt for recycling performance in 20/21 was anticipated at the time of setting the revenue budget, due to the impact of Covid-19 on consumption trends and associated volumes of waste collected. Hertfordshire County Council was however subsequently able to make some savings in residual waste disposal, which have been distributed to collection authorities based on their recycling performance. Following notification of the eligible receipt in July, the additional income has been earmarked for raising further awareness and the promotion of recycling and food waste reduction.		
Expenditure	78	112	+34		0	0
Income	0	(34)	(34)		0	0
Net Total:	78	78	0		0	0
Active Communities Service	80	48	(32)	Reduction in outturn follows the reorganisation of the Leisure and Active Communities Team, with the deletion of the Active Communities Manager post. The Covid-19 pandemic limited the ability of the service to both deliver activities, due to lockdown restrictions, and to secure external funding to finance projects and initiatives. Responsibility for delivering ongoing tasks and activities has been absorbed within the Leisure Manager and Leisure Officer posts.	0	(32)
Transport User Forum	47	7	(40)	This budget is for the costs of facilitating the User Forum, such as venue costs and consultant advice. The forums are currently held virtually due to the pandemic, which has reduced costs. There are no plans to change this in the current year, so it is anticipated that most of the budget will not be spent. A carry forward is requested to fund the costs of the User Forum in the next financial year.	40	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2022/23 £k
Car Parking Fees Income	(1,975)	(1,873)	+102	While increasing month on month, overall ticket sales in Quarter 1 were at approximately 70% of the level observed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Restrictions on social activities, such as indoor dining and visiting cinemas, remained in place throughout the quarter. Activity has continued to increase in the second quarter, with income achieved in July closer to 80% of that anticipated in the budget.	0	0
Car Park Season Ticket Income	(317)	(256)	+61	While income from season ticket sales in the first quarter was double that achieved in the final quarter of 20/21, it remained around half that generated prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. This reduction is attributed to greater levels of home working adopted in response to the pandemic, as government advice during the first quarter remained for people to work from home if they were able to.	0	0
Shared Internal Audit Service	105	84	(21)	The underspend variance follows the agreed reduction of 50 days to the audit plan from 2021/22. The efficiency proposal approved by Council in February had assumed a reduction of 15 days in 2022/23 and a further reduction of 15 days from 2023/24. With no further reductions now anticipated, the ongoing impact has been adjusted accordingly.	0	(16)
Total of explained variances	2,689	3,204	+515		51	160
Other minor balances	16,112	16,157	+45		0	15
Overall Total	18,801	19,361	+560		51	175

8.2. Cabinet are asked to approve the differences highlighted in the table above (a £560k increase in spend), as an adjustment to the working budget (recommendation 2.2). Cabinet are asked to note the estimated impact on the 2022/23 budget (£226k increase in budget, which includes the request to carry forward £51k of budget from 2021/22 to 2022/23), which will be incorporated in to the 2022/23 budget setting process (recommendation 2.3).

8.3. The original approved budget for 2021/22 (and therefore working budget) included efficiencies totalling £286k, which were agreed by Council in February 2021. Any under or over delivery of efficiencies will be picked up by any budget variances (table 3 above). However, there can be off-setting variances which mean that it is unclear whether the efficiency has been delivered. Where this is the case, this will be highlighted. The current forecast at the end of Quarter One is an overachievement of £21k. This relates to the reduction in audit days delivered by the Shared Internal Audit Service in this year being greater than originally proposed, as highlighted and explained in table three above.

8.4. The working budget for 2021/22 includes budgets totalling £719k that were carried forward from the previous year. These are generally carried forward so that they can be

spent for a particular purpose that had been due to happen in 2020/21 but was delayed into 2021/22. At Quarter One, it is forecast that £51k of the total carried forward will not be spent in 2021/22. The unspent total relates to the carry forwards in respect of the Artificial Intelligence software (£11k) and the Transport User Forum (£40k), both of which are highlighted and explained in table 3 above. All the unspent budget is requested to be carried forward again into the next financial year 2022/23.

- 8.5. There are 4 key corporate ‘financial health’ indicators identified in relation to key sources of income for the Council. Table 4 below shows the performance for the year. A comparison is made to the original budget to give the complete picture for the year. Each indicator is given a status of red, amber or green. A green indicator means that they are forecast to match or exceed the budgeted level of income. An amber indicator means that there is a risk that they will not meet the budgeted level of income. A red indicator means that they will not meet the budgeted level of income.
- 8.6. At the end of Quarter One, three of the indicators are green and one of the indicators is red. Explanation for the red indicator in respect of parking fees income is included in table 3 above. The projected overachievement of Land Charges income follows a review of the financial position of the Land Charges service, with a new fee structure implemented in May 2021. The forecast income variance is based on the revised fees and an estimated number of requests for searches. The income variance has however been offset by an anticipated corresponding increase in the spend on searches undertaken by third parties (both variances are included within the ‘other minor variances total’ in table 3).

Table 4 - Corporate financial health indicators

Indicator	Status	Original Budget	Actual to Date	Projected Outturn	Variance
		£k	£k	£k	£k
Planning Application Fees (including fees for pre-application advice)	Green	(953)	(585)	(953)	0
Land Charges	Green	(164)	(41)	(176)	(12)
Car Parking Fees	Red	(1,975)	(352)	(1,873)	102
Parking Penalty Charge Notices	Green	(573)	(140)	(573)	0

FUNDING, RISK AND GENERAL FUND BALANCE

- 8.7. The Council’s revenue budget is funded primarily from Council Tax and Retained Business Rates income. The Council was notified by Central Government in February 2021 of the amount of New Homes Bonus, Lower Tier Services Grant and Covid-19 Emergency Grant Funding it could also expect to receive in 2021/22 and planned accordingly.
- 8.8. Council Tax and Business Rates are accounted for in the Collection Fund rather than directly in our accounts, as we also collect them on behalf of other bodies. Each organisation has a share of the balance on the Collection Fund account. At the end of 2020/21 there was a deficit on the NHDC share of the Council Tax Collection Fund of £313k and a deficit on the Business Rates Collection Fund of £10.39m.
- 8.9. Statute requires that Collection Fund income amounts chargeable to the General Fund in 2021/22 are those estimates prepared around the time of setting the budget for the year (January 2021). The projected funding outturn in table 6 below has therefore been updated for the Council’s estimate of Business Rates income in 21/22, as declared to central government in January. This has increased the funding total by £13k, as the

budget expectation was based on the Council's business rates funding baseline need, as published annually by central government in the Local Government Finance Settlement, which is approximately the minimum that the Council can expect to retain.

- 8.10. The Council must repay in this year its share of the Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Fund deficits for the prior year, as estimated in January 2021. As reported previously, this means a contribution from the General Fund of £77k to the Council Tax Collection Fund and £7.9m to the Business Rates Collection Fund. As detailed and explained in the Revenue Outturn report 2020/21, the difference between these amounts and the final position will affect the calculation of funding available in future years, with the Council ultimately repaying the final deficit amounts recorded for 2020/21.
- 8.11. The Council is also subject to a business rates levy from Central Government as NHDC collects more in business rates than the baseline need determined by Central Government. In 2021/22 NHDC is a member of the Hertfordshire Business Rates Pool with five other Hertfordshire Local Authorities. The Pool was formed with the expectation that this should reduce the business rates levy amount otherwise payable at the end of the year. In 2020/21 the Council benefited from a 'pooling gain' (reduction to levy contribution) of £54k. As outlined in the Business Rates Pooling 2021/22 report presented to Cabinet in October, there are a range of potential outcomes for the current year, which depend on the actual level of rates collected by both North Herts as well as the other collection authorities in the Pool. The Council's contribution to the pool in 2021/22 will be funded from grant held in reserve and as such will have a net zero impact on the General Fund balance at the end of the year.
- 8.12. It is expected that the proposed changes to funding for Councils will not be implemented in 2022/23. This creates the possibility that Councils will again be invited to form Business Rate pools. In previous years this invite has come in early Autumn. Recommendation 2.4 seeks delegated approval (to the Service Director: Resources in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT) for the Council to be part of a pool if the option is available and it is estimated to be in the financial interests of the Council.
- 8.13. The Council receives compensation in the form of a grant from Central Government for business rate reliefs introduced, which goes into our funds rather than the Collection Fund. NHDC has received a total grant allocation of £1.794m for reliefs in 2021/22, which includes an amount of £142k received as compensation for the Government's decision to freeze the business rates multiplier for 2021/22. The multiplier compensation is included in the funding total in table 6 below. The rest of the grant received will be held in reserve to fund the repayment of business rate collection fund deficits recorded. Some of the amount held in reserve will therefore be used to fund the £7.9m deficit repayment required in this year.
- 8.14. The Council will receive from government non-ringfenced emergency grant funding in 2021/22 of £558k and a Council Tax Support Grant of £230k to help mitigate the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the MHCLG scheme inviting Local Authorities to apply for compensation for loss of sales, fees and charges income due to the impact of Covid-19 affecting demand has been extended to the end of the first quarter of 2021/22. At the time of setting the budget, it was estimated that the first quarter income compensation would total £140k. It is now estimated to total £185k, primarily due to the recovery in car parking activity being slower than anticipated.
- 8.15. The most significant financial impact of the pandemic in 2021/22 relates to the financial support required for SLL to maintain operations at the Council's Leisure Centres during the year. Estimated support was determined and approved by Council in January, with additional expenditure provision of £2m included in the revenue budget for 2021/22.

8.16. The original revenue budget was not adjusted for ongoing financial impacts in other service areas, with the risk instead reflected in the calculation of the minimum General Fund balance required at the start of the year. Table 5 below itemises those other service areas where the impact of Covid-19 in 2021/22 is significant and compares the relevant budget changes recommended in this report with the full year forecast declared to Government in the latest monthly Covid-19 monitoring return.

Table 5 – COVID-19 Financial Impact on General Fund

Budget Area	Revenue Budget Impact reported at Q1	Full Year Forecast Impact as reported to Government	Covered by Income guarantee *	Estimated Sales, Fees and Charges (SFC) Contribution	Balance not covered by SFC contribution
	£k	£k		£k	£k
Homeless Accommodation	160	160	No	0	160
Hitchin Town Hall	25	98	Yes	11	87
Car Parking Fees Income	102	437	Yes	16	421
Car Park Season Ticket Income	61	155	Yes	34	121
Trade Waste and Recycling	32	32	Yes	0**	32
Total	380	882		61	821

* Support from Government covers 75% of relevant losses that are in excess of 5% of the original budget up to the end of June 2021.

** Loss to end of June less than 5% of budget.

8.17. Table 5 indicates that the net impact of Covid-19 on the General Fund balance in 2021/22 from these service areas is forecast to be £821k, which is £441k greater than the total of the Covid-19 related variances included in table 3. To avoid understating the impact on the estimated year end position, only £117k of the un-ringfenced emergency grant funding (£558k less £441k) is shown in table 6 below. It should be noted that the parking fees estimate is based on the July parking fees income, which was about 80% of the budget expectation. This income could continue to recover towards budgeted levels or could be significantly affected by any further periods of restrictions.

8.18. Table 6 below summarises the impact on the General Fund balance of the position at Quarter One detailed in this report.

Table 6 – General Fund impact

	Working Budget	Projected Outturn	Difference
	£k	£k	£k
Brought Forward balance (1st April 2021)	(8,865)	(8,865)	-
Net Expenditure	18,801	19,361	560
Funding (Council Tax, Business Rates, NHB, Lower Tier Services Grant)	(15,122)	(15,135)	(13)
Contribution from Funding Equalisation Reserve	(398)	(398)	0
Contribution to Collection Fund	7,911	7,911	0
Funding from Reserves (including Business Rate Relief Grant)	(9,904)	(9,904)	0
Covid-19 un-ringfenced government grant funding (projection = applied at Q1)	(558)	(117)	441
Covid-19 related income losses compensation to June 2021	(140)	(185)	(45)
Covid-19 Council Tax Support Grant	(230)	(230)	0
Carried Forward balance (31st March 2022)	(8,505)	(7,562)	943

8.19. The minimum level of General Fund balance is determined based on known and unknown risks. Known risks are those things that we think could happen and we can forecast both a potential cost if they happen, and percentage likelihood. The notional amount is based on multiplying the cost by the potential likelihood. The notional amount for unknown risks is based on 5% of net expenditure. There is not an actual budget set aside for either of these risk types so, when they occur, they are reflected as budget variances (see table 3). We monitor the level of known risks that actually happen, as it highlights whether there might be further variances. This would be likely if a number of risks come to fruition during the early part of the year. We also use this monitoring to inform the assessment of risks in future years. The notional amount calculated at the start of the year for known risks was £2,101k, and at the end of the first quarter a total of £882k has come to fruition. The identified risks realised in the first quarter relates to

- Usage of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households (as highlighted in table 3 above) - £160k.
- Lower income generated from Hitchin Town Hall as the demand for bookings takes time to fully recover following the lifting of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions (as highlighted in table 3 above) - £25k.
- Income from Trade Refuse adversely affected by economic downturn (as highlighted in table 3 above) - £32k.

Table 8 – Known financial risks

	£'000
Original allowance for known financial risks	2,101
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 1	(217)
Remaining allowance for known financial risks	1,884

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. Specifically, 5.6.8 of Cabinet's terms of reference state that it has remit "*to monitor quarterly revenue expenditure and agree adjustments within the overall budgetary framework*". 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 of reserves.

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.

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 the risk of unplanned overspending of the overall Council budget.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their 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.
- 12.2. 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. The Social Value Act and “go local” policy do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1. None.

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1. None.