

Overview and Scrutiny: Customer and Digital Directorate Update

At a recent Executive Member Briefing, Cllr Adrian Lowe, Executive Member (Customer and Streetscene Services) requested that a note be presented to Overview and Scrutiny to outline the revenues recovery action being taken following a temporary hold on action as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and also an update on the review of Streetscene targets.

Revenues recovery action

Following national lockdown in March 2020, it was agreed that recovery action be suspended for council tax, business rates, housing benefit overpayments, miscellaneous payments and fixed penalty notices.

This coincided with the cessation of court hearings and the introduction of temporary legislation preventing the use of enforcement in respect of debt recovery.

In August 2020, after an easing of restrictions and following further discussion, member agreement was given to send soft reminders for council tax and business rates followed by statutory reminders.

Statutory reminders then continued for council tax and business rates, however further stages of recovery such as enforcement action and attachment of earnings remained on hold.

In view of the uncertainty around local and national lockdowns and the impact on the economy and individuals and the government grant and support schemes it was considered prudent to delay the commencement of significant recovery action until the new financial year.

In June of this year it was agreed that an engagement letter be sent in respect of all outstanding sums which had not been sent any kind of reminder this financial year. This included a soft reminder from the enforcement agents to all their outstanding cases.

Recovery for all revenue streams has continued as normal from July, including reminders, final notices, summonses, liability orders, enforcement, attachment of earnings and benefit orders.

Council tax collection rates are down on 2019-20, however, not significantly so and as would be expected considering the circumstances of the last eighteen months.

Business rates (NNDR) collection has been impacted by an increase of £3.4m in the net collectable debit. This is because Expanded Retail Discount relief reduced from 100% to 66% from 1 July 2021. Performance should improve as monthly instalments are paid until March. Also, anticipated recovery in the local economy should also support an improvement.

The table below shows collection as at the end of July 2021 compared to the two previous years:

Council tax*			NNDR**		
19-20	20-21	21-22	19-20	20-21	21-22
37.50%	36.20%	37.10%	39.36%	34.68%	30.94%

*The net collectable Council Tax debit for 2021/22 is £ 75,454,685

**The net collectable NNDR debit for 2021/22 is £ 21,614,819

Streetscene performance targets

The targets for Streetscene performance have been increased from 80% to 85% from July 2021.

Performance across these services is affected by inclement weather and machinery performance. So although targets have been increased to be more challenging, they take into account some the associated and unpredictable challenges with service delivery.