



Joint Committee Performance Report

April 2021



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All Partner Councils Combined



Business Rates Collection					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 19,006,185	£ -	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 15,189,770	£ 84,442,614	£ 128,305,577	£ 161,555,776	●
2020/21	£ 14,619,386	£ 80,234,076	£ 109,252,556	£ 151,680,832	●
			Year End Target	£161,555,776	●

Council Tax Collection					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£47,839,291	£0	£0	£0	●
Target	£46,999,294	£268,533,270	£403,621,187	£475,114,297	●
2020/21	£43,558,025	£251,468,250	£337,359,826	£454,493,276	●
			Year End Target	£475,114,297	●

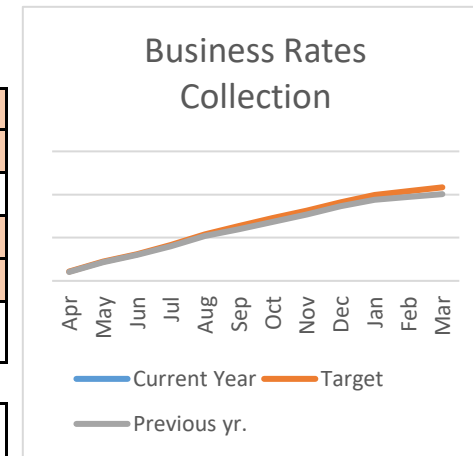
Number of Electronic Forms Received					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	4,009	0	0	0	●
2020/21	4,460	23,189	37,184	55,159	●
			Year End Target	55159	●

Fraud and Compliance	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	Yr Target
Single Person Discount Fraud	£268,389	£0	£0	£0	£500,000
Local Council Tax Support	£6,295	£0	£0	£0	£150,000
Tenancy Fraud	£3,240	£0	£0	£0	£400,000
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£47,547	£0	£0	£0	£250,000
Fraud Identified	£325,472	£0	£0	£0	£1,300,000

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 3,291,836	£ -	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 2,157,262	£ 12,716,509	£ 18,161,309	£ 21,663,386	
Refunds	£ 36,798	£ -	£ -	£ -	
2020/21	£ 2,056,640	£ 11,935,167	£ 17,330,233	£ 20,092,010	●

Year End Target	£ 21,663,386	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

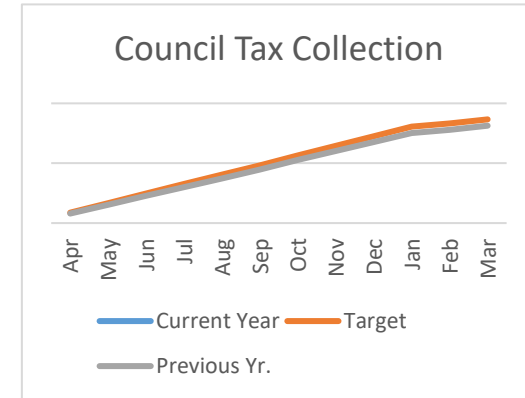
Narrative

Collection is on target. Targets will be adjusted to reflect the grants which will be received this year in respect of the rate reliefs funded by Government.

Further recovery action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £200. Enforcement action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £1,402.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 8,523,495	£ -	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 8,713,237	£ 48,331,128	£ 72,611,966	£ 86,608,060	
Refunds	£ 79,178	£ -	£ -	£ -	
2020/21	£ 7,960,294	£ 44,806,050	£ 67,828,605	£ 81,338,654	●



Year End Target	£86,608,060	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is behind target by £189,742. In the last financial year formal recovery proceedings were delayed and some customers made extended arrangements into this financial year. We will continue to monitor the effect this may have on current year collection.

Further recovery action in 21/22 has resulted in collection of £15,452. Enforcement action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £58,029.

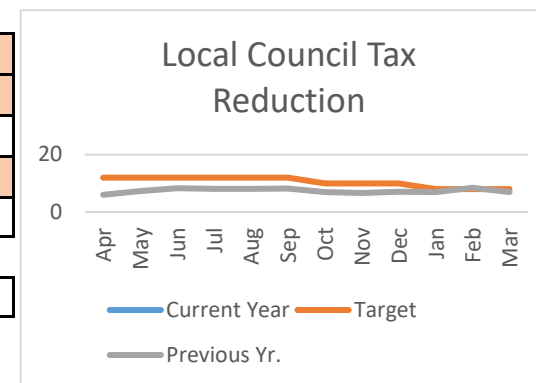
Charging Orders have been obtained to secure £387,986 debt.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support

	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	8.79	0.00	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	6.02	8.20	7.04	6.98	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Description

This indicator measures the average year to date number of days to process Council Tax reduction new claims and change of circumstances.

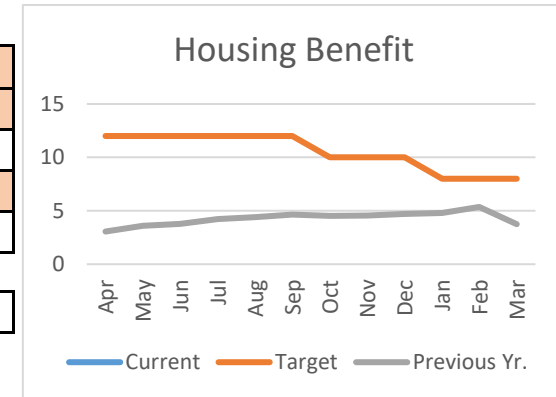
Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target, subject to potential demand growth due to the economic impacts of the easing of Covid-19 funding schemes later in the year.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	8.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	3.06	4.64	4.72	3.74	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Housing Benefit new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target, subject to potential demand growth due to the economic impacts of the easing of Covid-19 funding schemes later in the year.

Fraud and Compliance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team continue to be tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

Local Council Tax Support, Single Person Discount, Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates.

The team continue to proactively seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges.

The team are also forging closer working relationships with a number of service areas in an attempt prevent and detect fraud and error.

A close working relationship with both Planning Enforcement has resulted in a number of positive outcomes.

In a broader sense the team continue to work closely with County in the management of the Fraud Hub in Norfolk. This is an attempt to match data sets across County to increase Council Tax and Business Rate income. Funding from Norfolk county continues to support Single Person Discount Reviews.

The team have also been working with NNDR in post assurance business rates grants and also have investigations in respect of false applications. One prosecution under the Fraud Act 2006 has been sanctioned and a defendant is awaiting court appearance during late May 2021.

	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£76,694	£0	£0	£0
Local Council Tax Support	£0	£0	£0	£0
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£6,820	£0	£0	£0
Fraud Identified	£83,514	£0	£0	£0



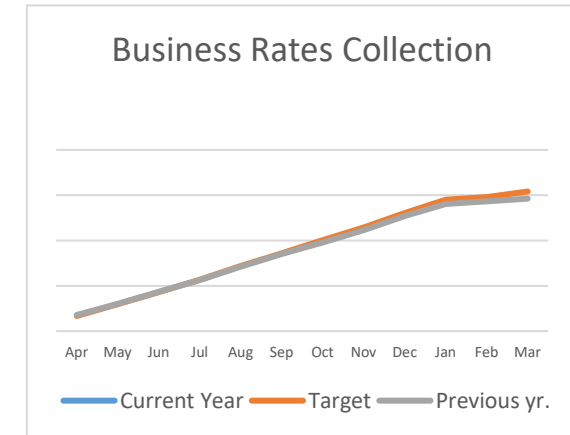
Performance Information April 2021



Business Rates

Business Rates Collection						
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2021/22	£ 1,489,238	£ -	£ -	£ -		●
Target	£ 1,673,872	£ 8,581,891	£ 13,028,927	£ 15,404,924		
Refunds	£ 801,406	£ -	£ -	£ -		
2020/21	£ 1,778,163	£ 8,513,137	£ 12,702,067	£ 14,622,123		●

Full Year Target	£15,404,924	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is behind target for the current financial year, however this is due to some internal transfers which have not yet been actioned. It is expected the situation will be reversed in May. Targets will be adjusted to reflect the grants which will be received this year in respect of the rate reliefs funded by Government.

There had been claims by NHS Trusts for charitable rate relief which were subject to a High Court appeal. If successful this could have resulted in a backdated refund of £553K. The High Court rejected the claim that the NHS Trusts are charities, however initially the NHS trusts appealed this decision but this has now been withdrawn.

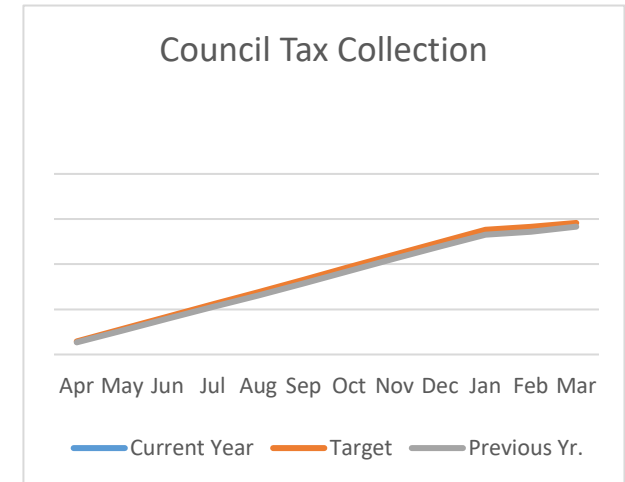


Council Tax



Council Tax Collection					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 5,932,949	£ -	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 5,786,385	£ 33,160,487	£ 49,781,334	£ 58,281,818	
Refunds	£ 60,467	£ -	£ -	£ -	
2020/21	£ 5,378,194	£ 31,561,919	£ 47,847,998	£ 56,630,706	●

Year End Target	£ 58,281,818	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is on target for the current financial year. In the last financial year formal recovery proceedings were delayed and some customers made extended arrangements into this financial year. We will continue to monitor the effect this may have on current year collection.

Further recovery action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £12,241. Enforcement action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £35,227.

Charging Orders have been obtained to secure £322,421 debt.

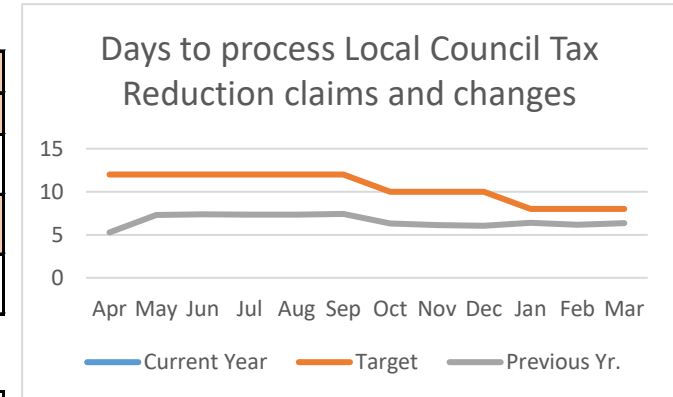


Local Council Tax Reduction



Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	8.17	0.00	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	5.27	7.42	6.03	6.36	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Council Tax reduction new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

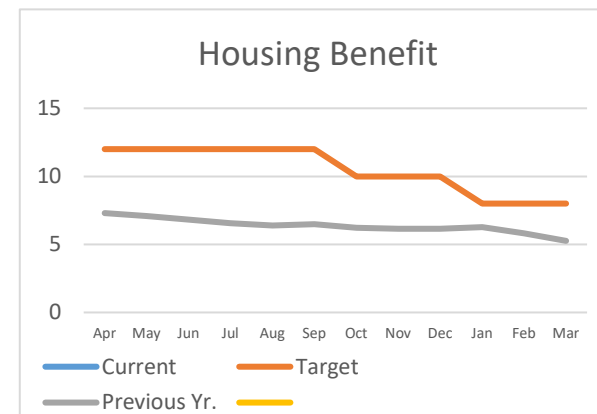
This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target, subject to potential demand growth due to the economic impacts of the easing of Covid-19 funding schemes later in the year.



Housing Benefit



Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	12.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	7.30	6.48	6.14	5.26	●
Year End Target		8		●	



Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Housing Benefit new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

The target has been met for April, despite one off delays with annual rent increases. We expect to achieve year end target, subject to potential demand growth due to the economic impacts of the easing of Covid-19 funding schemes later in the year.



Fraud and Compliance



Fraud and Compliance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team continue to be tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

Local Council Tax Support, Single Person Discount, Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates.

The review of newly awarded Single Person Discounts continues to provide positive outcomes.

The team are working with the largest Social Housing provider in the authority to tackle Right to Buy and subletting abuse.

The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges.

In a broader sense the team are also working with Cambridgeshire County in setting up the Fraud Hub in Cambridgeshire. This is an attempt to match data sets across County to increase Council Tax and Business Rate income. A business case and project team is progressing the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub and an update is expected in terms of its progression and procurement of software. Once operating this will align the work of the fraud team across the partnership.

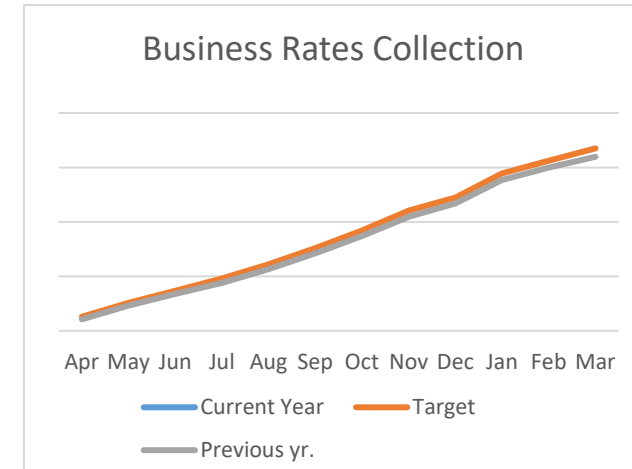
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£19,811	£0	£0	£0
Local Council Tax Support	£0	£0	£0	£0
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£22,112	£0	£0	£0
Fraud Identified	£41,923	£0	£0	£0

Performance Information April 2021

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 6,567,353	£ -	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 5,157,542	£ 30,313,003	£ 48,902,987	£ 66,998,352	
Refunds	£ 179,722	£ -	£ -	£ -	
2020/21	£ 4,222,524	£ 28,476,749	£ 46,751,882	£ 63,912,082	●

Year End Target	66,998,352	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

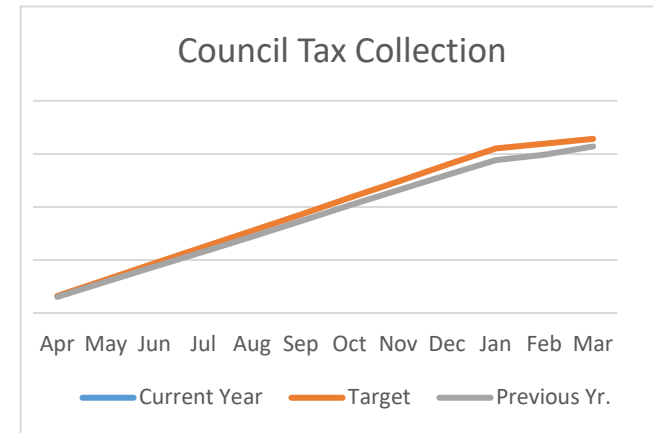
Collection is on target. Targets will be adjusted to reflect the grants which will be received this year in respect of the rate reliefs funded by Government.

Further recovery action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £1,363. Enforcement action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £650.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 16,813,631	£ -	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 16,148,957	£ 92,913,773	£ 139,808,907	£ 164,143,078	
Refunds	£ 173,068	£ -	£ -	£ -	
2020/21	£ 4,222,524	£ 86,547,244	£ 130,268,131	£ 157,025,532	●

Year End Target	164,143,078	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is on target for the current financial year. In the last financial year formal recovery proceedings were delayed and some customers made extended arrangements into this financial year. We will continue to monitor the effect this may have on current year collection.

Further recovery action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £12,681. Enforcement action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £61,825.

Charging Orders have been obtained to secure £516,143 debt

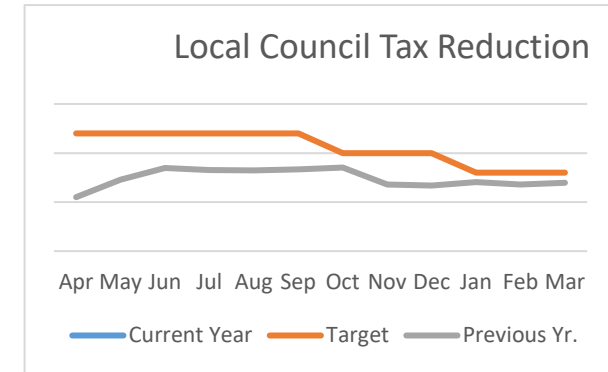


Local Council Tax Reduction



Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	9.37	0.00	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	5.50	8.32	6.70	6.98	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Council Tax reduction new claims and change of circumstances.

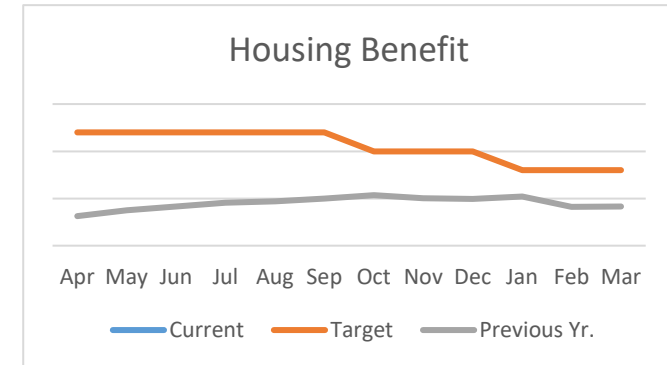
Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target, subject to potential demand growth due to the economic impacts of the easing of Covid-19 funding schemes later in the year.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	9.45	0.00	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	3.13	4.98	4.95	4.14	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Housing Benefit new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target, subject to potential demand growth due to the economic impacts of the easing of Covid-19 funding schemes later in the year.

Fraud and Compliance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team continue to be tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

Local Council Tax Support, Single Person Discount, Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates.

The reviews of NFI SPD matches and newly awarded Single Person Discounts continue to provide very positive outcomes.

The team work closely with the East Suffolk Corporate Fraud Team and ensure the transfer of fraud referrals across the teams.

The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges.

The team are trying to progress closer working relationships with service areas in an attempt prevent and detect fraud and error.

The team have also assisted NNDR in due diligence checks of businesses applying for COVID 19 government grants.

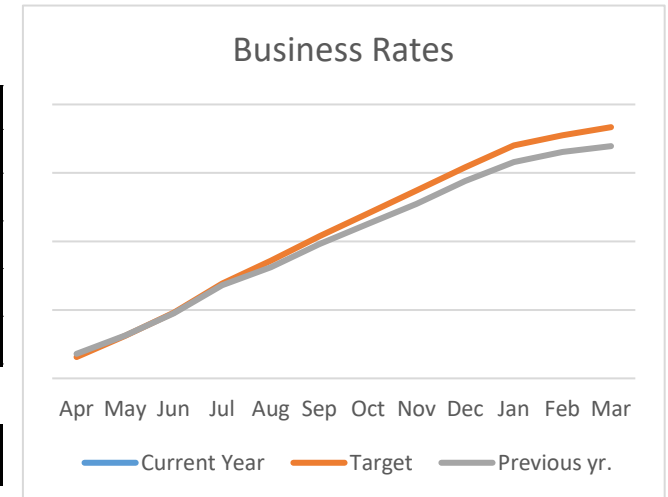
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£79,291	£0	£0	£0
Local Council Tax Support	£1,581	£0	£0	£0
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Fraud Identified	£80,872	£0	£0	£0

Performance Information April 2021

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection						
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2021/22	£ 1,785,160	£ -	£ -	£ -		●
Target	£ 1,556,992	£ 10,380,723	£ 15,415,767	£ 18,341,776		
Refunds	£ 119,913	£ -	£ -	£ -		
2020/21	£ 1,790,970	£ 9,815,866	£ 14,405,039	£ 16,956,825		●

Year End Target	£18,341,776	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is on target. Targets will be adjusted to reflect the grants which will be received this year in respect of the rate reliefs funded by Government.

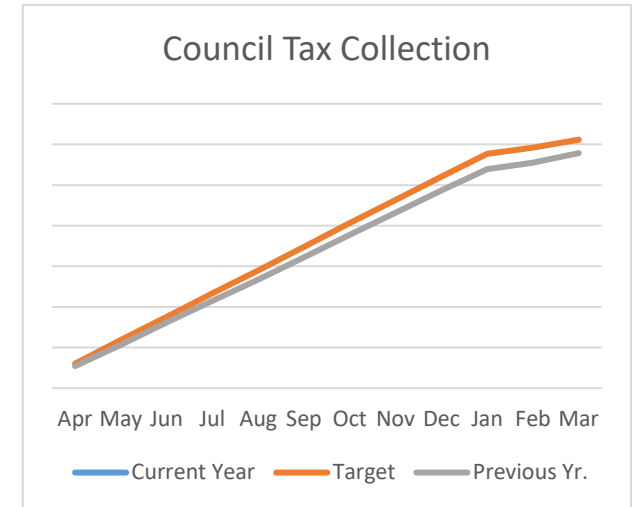
There had been claims by NHS Trusts for charitable rate relief which were subject to a High Court appeal. If successful this could have resulted in a large backdated refund. The High Court rejected the claim that the NHS Trusts are charities, however initially the NHS trusts appealed this decision but this has now been withdrawn.

Further recovery action in 2021/22 has not resulted in any collection. Enforcement action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £6,914.

Council Tax

Council Tax Collection					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 6,005,097	£ -	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 6,029,408	£ 34,743,756	£ 52,062,693	£ 61,172,317	
Refunds	£ 71,586	£ -	£ -	£ -	
2020/21	£ 5,431,478	£ 32,182,036	£ 48,651,700	£ 57,863,955	●

Year End Target	£61,172,317	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is behind target by £24,310. In the last financial year formal recovery proceedings were delayed and some customers made extended arrangements into this financial year. We will continue to monitor the effect this may have on current year collection.

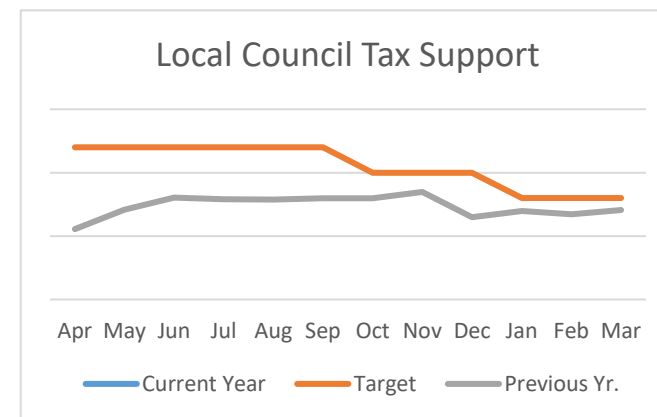
Further recovery action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £5,752. Enforcement action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £56,438.

Charging Orders have been obtained to secure £373,638 debt.

Local Council Tax Reduction

Days to process Local Council Tax Support					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	9.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	5.55	7.98	6.49	7.06	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Council Tax reduction new claims and change of circumstances.

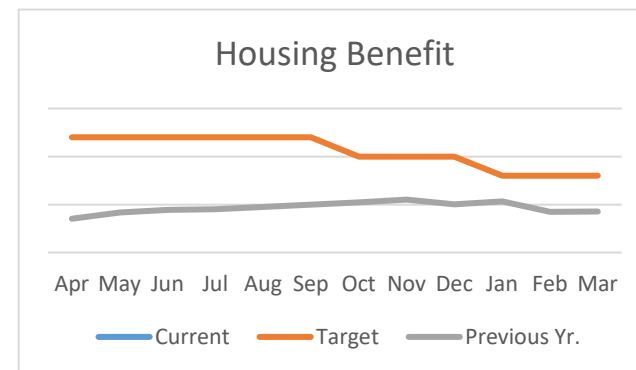
Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target, subject to potential demand growth due to the economic impacts of the easing of Covid-19 funding schemes later in the year.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	8.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	3.52	4.98	5.01	4.28	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Housing Benefit new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target, subject to potential demand growth due to the economic impacts of the easing of Covid-19 funding schemes later in the year.

Fraud and Compliance

Fraud and Compliance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team continue to be tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

Local Council Tax Support, Single Person Discount, Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates.

The review of newly awarded Single Person Discounts continues to provide positive outcomes.

The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges.

The team are trying to progress closer working relationships with service areas in an attempt prevent and detect fraud and error.

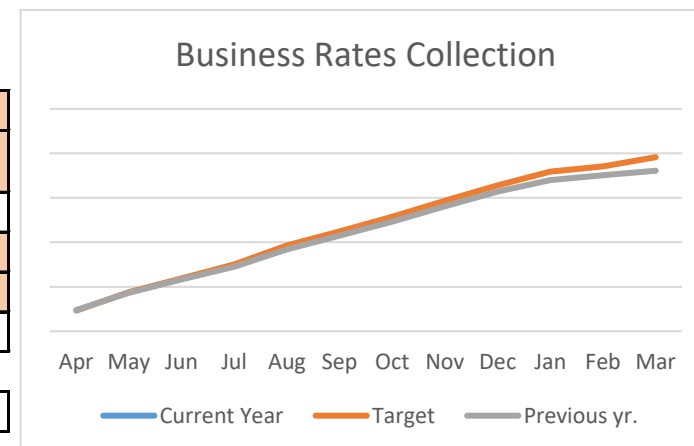
In a broader sense the team are also working with Cambridgeshire County in setting up the Fraud Hub in Cambridgeshire. This is an attempt to match data sets across County to increase Council Tax and Business Rate income. A business case and project team is progressing the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub. An update is expected in terms of its progression and procurement of software. Once operating this will align the work of the fraud team across the partnership.

	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£39,118	£0	£0	£0
Local Council Tax Support	£834	£0	£0	£0
Tenancy Fraud	£0	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£6,464	£0	£0	£0
Fraud Identified	£46,416	£0	£0	£0

Business Rates

Business Rates Collection						
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4		
2021/22	£ 5,872,598	£ -	£ -	£ -	●	
Target	£ 4,644,102	£ 22,450,488	£ 32,796,587	£ 39,147,338		
Refunds	£ 119,809	£ -	£ -	£ -		
2020/21	£ 4,771,089	£ 21,493,157	£ 31,404,393	£ 36,097,792	●	

Year End Target	39,147,338	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the NNDR Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

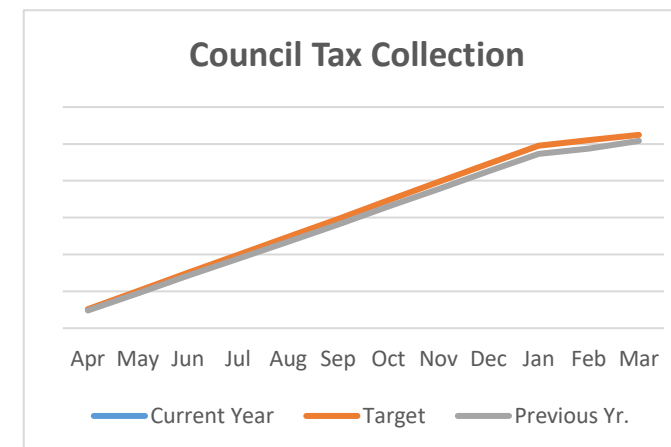
Collection is on target. Targets will be adjusted to reflect the grants which will be received this year in respect of the rate reliefs funded by Government.

There had been claims by NHS Trusts for charitable rate relief which were subject to a High Court appeal. If successful this could have resulted in a large backdated refund. The High Court rejected the claim that the NHS Trusts are charities, however initially the NHS trusts appealed this decision but this has now been withdrawn.

Further recovery action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £34,127. Enforcement action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £8,161.

Council Tax Collection					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	£ 10,564,118	£ -	£ -	£ -	●
Target	£ 10,321,308	£ 59,384,126	£ 89,356,287	£ 104,909,024	
Refunds	£ 113,064	£ -	£ -	£ -	
2020/21	£ 9,604,636	£ 56,371,002	£ 85,229,464	£ 101,634,429	●

Year End Target	104,909,024	●
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Description

This shows the amount of money required to be collected within the financial year, payable to the Council Tax Collection Fund against the actual collection.

Narrative

Collection is on target for the current financial year. In the last financial year formal recovery proceedings were delayed and some customers made extended arrangements into this financial year. We will continue to monitor the effect this may have on current year collection.

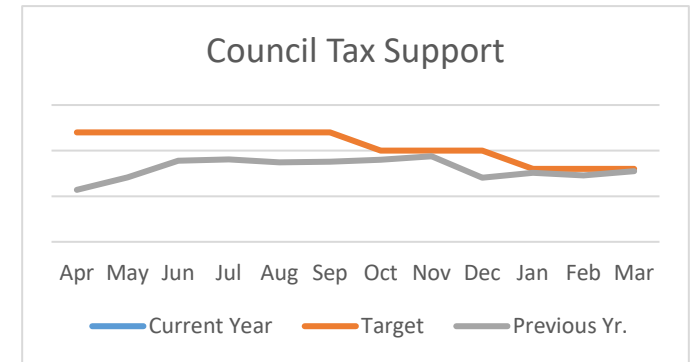
Further recovery action in 2021/22 has resulted in collection of £12,284. Enforcement action in 2020/21 has resulted in collection of £60,114.

Charging Orders have been obtained to secure £509,949 debt.

Days to process Local Council Tax Support

	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	9.38	0.00	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	5.70	8.79	7.04	7.73	●

Year End Target	8	●
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Description

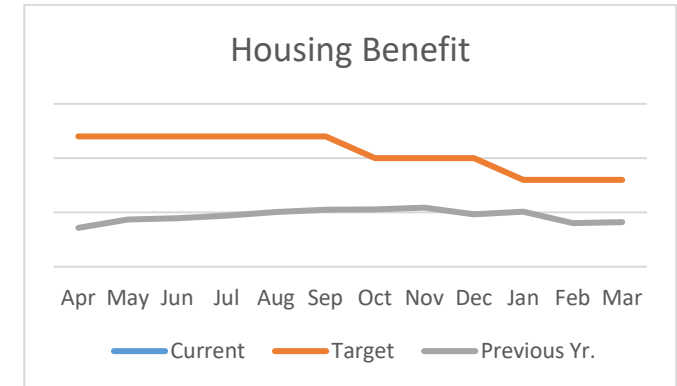
This indicator measures the average number of days to process Council Tax reduction new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target, subject to potential demand growth due to the economic impacts of the easing of Covid-19 funding schemes later in the year.

Housing Benefit

Days to process Housing Benefit					
	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2021/22	7.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	●
Target	12	12	10	8	
2020/21	3.58	5.24	4.82	4.10	●
Year End Target		8		●	



Description

This indicator measures the average number of days to process Housing Benefit new claims and change of circumstances.

Narrative

This indicator has been met for this period and is expected to achieve year end target, subject to potential demand growth due to the economic impacts of the easing of Covid-19 funding schemes later in the year.

Fraud and Compliance

Following the transfer of Housing Benefit fraud to the DWP on the 1 September 2015, the team continue to be tasked, in accordance with the Business Case approved by Joint Committee, to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

Local Council Tax Support, Single Person Discount, Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates.

The team work closely with the Housing Option Team and also with Housing Associations to tackle Right to Buy and subletting abuse where investigation agreements are in place. The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges – including possible retrospective charges. The team are also forging closer working relationships with a number of service areas in an attempt prevent and detect fraud and error. A closer working relationship with Planning Enforcement, Public Health and Housing and Economic Development has had a positive effect. The team continue to assist in both pre and post assurance of businesses entitled to the NNDR government business rates grant scheme. The team continue to work closely with the Internal Audit team to carry out the assurance work. Through this close relationship working a number of Council Tax investigations have been identified with significant savings recorded.

	Apr-21	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Person Discount Fraud	£53,475	£0	£0	£0
Local Council Tax Support	£3,880	£0	£0	£0
Tenancy Fraud	£3,240	£0	£0	£0
Other (Council Tax and NDR)	£12,152	£0	£0	£0
Fraud Identified	£72,746	£0	£0	£0

Service Updates as at April 2021



Enforcement

Enforcement visits are continuing with all the necessary personal protective equipment and risk assessment in place. Collection has continued to rise back to near normal levels. We continue to try and engage with customers offering long term payment arrangements and assisting customers where possible.

The first parking cases for West Suffolk have recently been sent to the team and we have collected our first payments in respect of these cases.

This year we £426K in April compared to £304K at the same point last year.

Further Recovery

Collection through further recovery actions can continue as usual this year and we would expect to see collection reach the levels we achieved prior to Covid.

Funding has been secured from Norfolk & Suffolk County Council for this financial year in respect of this work. Fenland District Council and East Cambridgeshire District Council are also contributing to allow this work to be carried out for all ARP partners.

Non-Domestic Rates

In the budget on 3 March 2021, the Government announced that retail, hospitality & leisure relief would be extended into the 2021/22 financial year but from 1 July 2021 would be reduced to 66%. Rate relief for children's nurseries was similarly extended. We were able to issue the annual bills in time for the 1st instalment on 1 April with full rate relief for those entitled, however we will need to issue revised bills in June 2021 to reduce the rate relief to 66%. Correspondence to the team increased when the bills were issued.

Several businesses have raised appeals with the Valuation Office against their rateable values on the basis that Covid has affected the value. The Government has passed legislation which has meant these reductions cannot be considered and has announced that they will fund further discretionary rate relief to those businesses affected. We await guidance and funding on this matter and will then design a scheme for approval.

An interim report has been published into the Governments call for evidence on business rates review. We await the outcome in the autumn.

Legislation has finally been passed which allows 100% rate relief in respect of public conveniences. Accounts will be amended shortly and revised accounts issued showing the rate relief.

The revaluation planned to take place on 1 April 2021 has been postponed until 1 April 2023 with an antecedent date of 1 April 2021 (this is the date that the valuations are based on).

Council Tax

Demand for council tax billing continues at very high levels due to Covid-19, in particular the high number of people moving to take advantage of the extended stamp duty holiday. However, outstanding work continues to be below the peaks previously seen which is testament to our project to introduce the generic Council Tax Billing Officer role, which provides a resilient team who have been able to switch between billing and benefits to help cope with ever changing workloads and priorities during the pandemic, providing increased flexibility to the use of our resources, along with maximisation automation functionality.

In the last financial year formal recovery proceedings were delayed and some customers made extended arrangements into this financial year. This may impact on current year collection and we will monitor the situation closely.

A new statutory provision called "Breathing space" was introduced on 4 May 2021. This gives debtors a 60 day moratorium from recovery action for their debts. Changes to our processes and systems have been put in place to ensure we can comply with the new legislation.

Benefits

Both Council Tax Support and Benefits performance has achieved targets, despite the increased demand attributed to COVID-19 and the usual increased demand generated by issuing annual Council Tax bills and updating notifications.

We continue to see increases in claims, in particular we are seeing a 130% increase in change of addresses as people take advantage of the extended stamp duty holiday and low interest rates. We will continue to utilise generically trained staff to focus resource where it is most needed.

The Track & Trace Self Isolation payment scheme continues to 30th June, with claims possible up to 28 days later, so we anticipate continuing to determine them into July. We have updated our schemes to include provision for parents of school age children required to self-isolate to apply for a payment.

ARP Systems and Digital

System admin's main priority this quarter is rebilling for Ndr retail relief, expectations are that we should receive a software patch from Capita on 4th June 2021 and testing/ updating live needs to be expedited to ensure we rebill as soon as possible.

Going forward both System admin and EDMS team are working on a multitude of projects and developments that have been prioritised. This will involve engaging with both Capita and Civica on areas of improvement, development. In particular we are focused on Change of Address for Council tax automation. We are very keen to work with Capita and other Local authorities on identifying strengths and weaknesses to ensure that we maximise the automation level.

Fraud and Compliance

The Fraud Team continue to work with social housing providers in an attempt to expand the commercial aspect of their investigation service. With Covid 19 restrictions still in place by Central Government the fraud team have further reviewed the work of the visiting officers, in order to comply with current Government guidance. The team have carried out a review of the risk assessment which has enabled procedures and protocols for the visiting officers to be put in place, along with the supply of relevant Personal Protective Equipment for visits. Desk based Fraud and Compliance work continues as usual, with all of the Fraud Team able to fully work from home.

There has been some progression with the Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub and continued discussion with East Camb's DC and Fenland DC for the business case to extend the Fraud and Compliance work for the two partners. If approved this would align the Fraud and Compliance work currently being carried out for other partners of the Anglia Revenues Partnership as indicated in the fraud savings on the quarterly performance report. This work has consistently seen savings outweighing the costs of the work in the areas of Local Council Tax Reduction and Single Person Discounts particularly, over a number of years. Norfolk County Council and now Suffolk County Council have committed to continue providing funding until March 2022. Norfolk County Council have additionally funded one Council Tax compliance Officer for 2021/2022 to continue Single Person Discount reviews for Norwich City Council and any additional work identified through the Norfolk Fraud Hub.

During the pandemic it has not been possible to interview customers under caution on a face to face basis. Advice has been taken from the Law Society and the Crown Prosecution Service in relation to alternative methods of interviewing under caution. With assistance from the solicitor used for ARP Fraud prosecutions it has been agreed that customers will be interviewed by letter and a process and procedure has been set up to enable this. A number of sanctions have now been conducted using this process.

Joint working with the DWP is now part of ongoing discussions and it is planned that from June 2021 joint investigations and interviews will recommence.

The Fraud and Compliance Team have yet again had an exceptional year in terms of Fraud identified within the partnership despite a number of challenges though the year.

A current project within the Visiting Team is Total Mobile and agile working electronic method of raising and conducting Council Tax inspections across the partnership. The second phase will include the inspection of empty business rate properties.

Better Customer Journeys Programme

Customer Strategy Team (CST) has met once in Q1 (as at 20 May). Its main priority in 2021-22 will be ensuring that customer teams and the shared revenues and benefits team collaborate to refine the key performance measures that will help it prioritise customer journey projects. For example, CST has specified a tightening of telephone handling rates from 85% to 90% and a reduction in complaint response timeframes from 28 to 21 calendar days.

At OIB's input, the CST chair has been added to the question-and-answer segment of the recruitment process for strategic management, which has added to the already strong focus on customer priorities for these roles.

Notwithstanding performance framework outputs, CST is preparing in any case to review out-facing communications to customers, across eforms, selfservice platforms, paper and electronic correspondence, phone call handling and web content. The team will be evaluating a mooted transition towards revenues and benefits services being badged more clearly as council services, with less emphasis on an 'ARP' identity. An update by CST to Joint Committee in September, on each partner's position on customer self-service, will form part of this evaluation. A key theme for CST will be making sure that we monitor not only the volume of self-service sign-up, but more importantly the quality and retention of those channels, to make sure they are as responsive and useful as more traditional phone and face-to-face contact.