

Agenda Item	7.
Report No	RES/19/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Corporate Resources Committee

Date: 12 August 2020

Report Title: Corporate Resources Service - Quarterly Performance Report

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Finance and Resources

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides performance information against the Accounts Commission's Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) together with key performance measures as at 30 June 2020.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are invited to:
- i. scrutinise these statutory and key performance indicators.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – the resource implications are detailed within the report.
- 3.2 Legal – there are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - the prompt processing of benefit claims and the proactive welfare support for customers directly mitigate some of the poverty challenges. The additional benefit gains for customers has positive social and economic impacts for local communities and alleviates inequalities.
- 3.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever – the reduction in paper usage set out at Section 10 below supports the Council's Climate Change/Carbon Clever commitments.
- 3.5 Risk – there are no risk implications arising from this report.
- 3.6 Gaelic - there are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

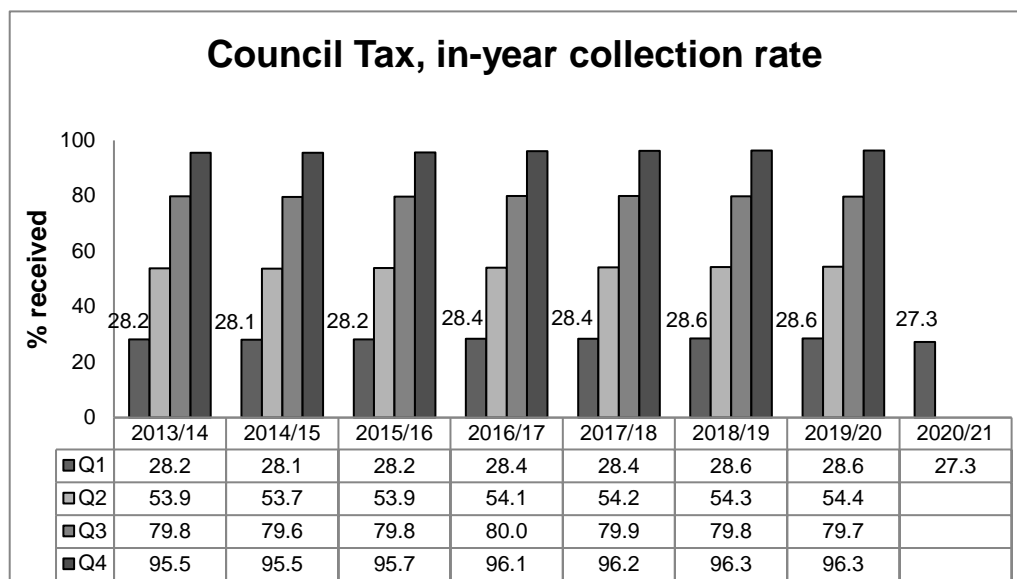
4. Background

- 4.1 This report includes performance against the Accounts Commission's Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) together with key performance measures and will be provided to this Committee on a quarterly basis so that trends can be monitored.
- 4.2 Current year figures are compared with those from the corresponding period in the previous financial year where these are available. In addition, figures from previous years are included where appropriate so that trends may be scrutinised.
- 4.3 Where definitions have changed, direct comparisons can only be made within the time period to which that definition has applied.
- 4.4 A list of the current SPIs for the Corporate Resources Service, together with the frequency of reporting, is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.

5. Council Tax In-Year Collection Rate

- 5.1 The Council Tax in-year collection rate in Q1 is 27.3%, representing a reduction of 1.3% on the comparable period last year; this reduction in collections is symptomatic of the COVID-19 economic impacts on household incomes. As set out in the performance monitoring report for welfare, advice and information services on today's agenda, the number of people in Highland claiming Universal Credit increased by 79.19% when comparing March to June 2020, of which around 62% of those claiming are not in employment.
- 5.2 Officers continue to promote Council Tax Reduction (CTR) for low income households, including for those who own their homes, as this will reduce their council tax liability by up to 100%. CTR is not available on water and waste water charges.

5.3



- 5.4 Direct debits now make up 73.86% of bill payments, representing 83.50% of receipts. This compares to a prior year position of 74.11% and 79.69%, respectively. There has been an increase of 0.62% in payers paying over 12 months rather than 10 compared to June 2019. Increased Direct Debit take-up supports collections performance and

reduces bank charges, enabling financial savings to be made. Direct Debit performance is closely monitored and action taken to encourage this payment method.

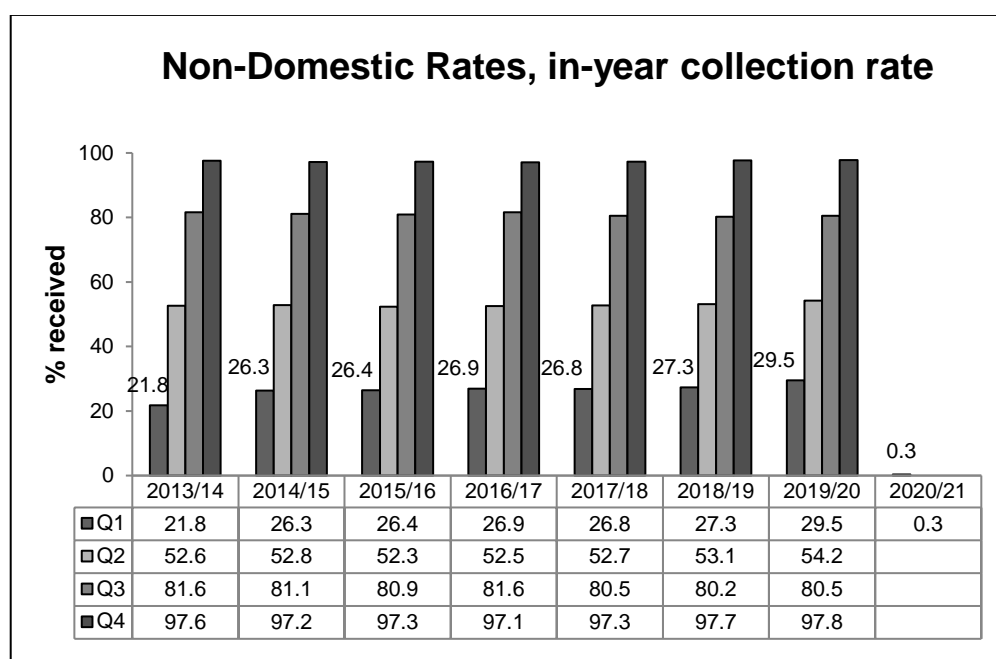
6. Non-Domestic Rates In-Year Collection Rate

6.1 During the COVID-19 lockdown, NDR annual billing was postponed until mid-June 2020 to alleviate the financial pressures for business and to enable the Council's software supplier to provide the necessary update to cater for annual billing. The first instalment for NDR is due for payment during July 2020 rather than 1 April 2020 which is reflected in the collection rate reported to today's meeting. The reported rate is as at 16 July 2020

6.2 The significant package of relief for businesses provides for 100% relief from rates for some rate payers as set out in the comprehensive information leaflet that was enclosed with all rates bills. This information is available on the Council's website at this [link](#) and a copy is included in today's report at *Appendix 2*. The Q2 monitoring will provide a more reflective position for this indicator.

6.3 During Q1, the NDR team, supplemented by staff from the wider Revenues & Customer Services section, was wholly focused on administering small business grants. The Revenues Manager was responsible for considering Stage 1 appeals and the Interim Head of Revenues & Customer Services responsible for Stage 2 appeals. Applications to the grant scheme closed on 10 July 2020, reducing the resource required for this purpose.

6.4

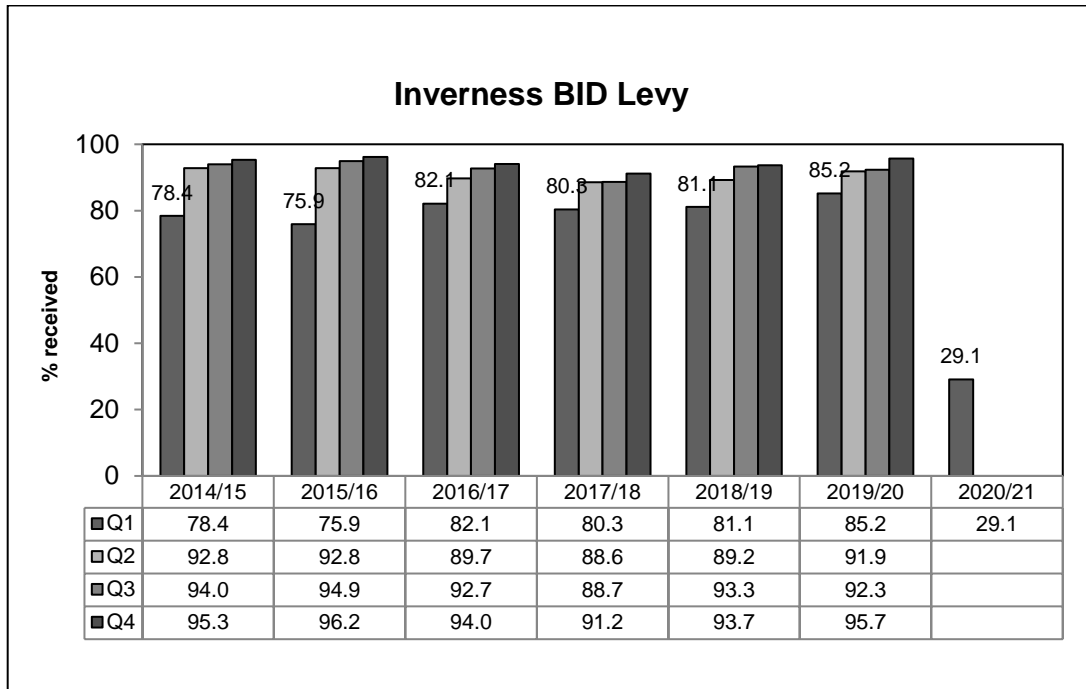


7. Business Improvement Districts (BID)

7.1 Inverness BID Levy

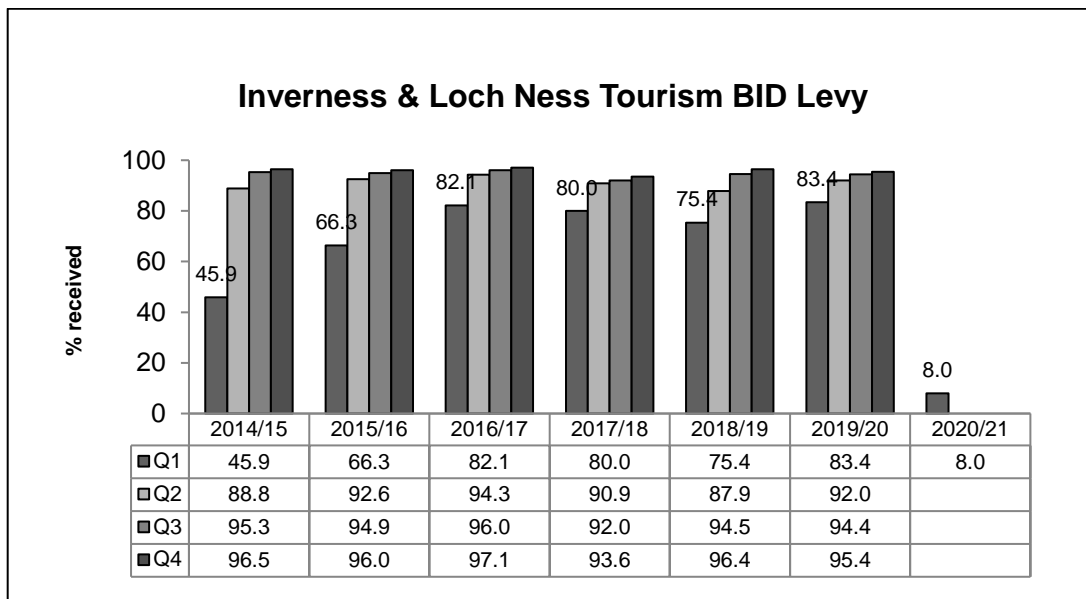
7.2 Billing for Inverness BID and Inverness & Loch Ness Tourism BID levies was undertaken in April 2020 as in previous years. Both BID Boards delayed the payment date to 28 November 2020 to reflect the economic impacts for businesses arising from COVID-19. These delayed payment due dates are reflected in the undernoted collection rates. This approach enabled those businesses that were able to contribute payments to do so.

7.3



7.4 ***Inverness & Loch Ness Tourism BID Levy***

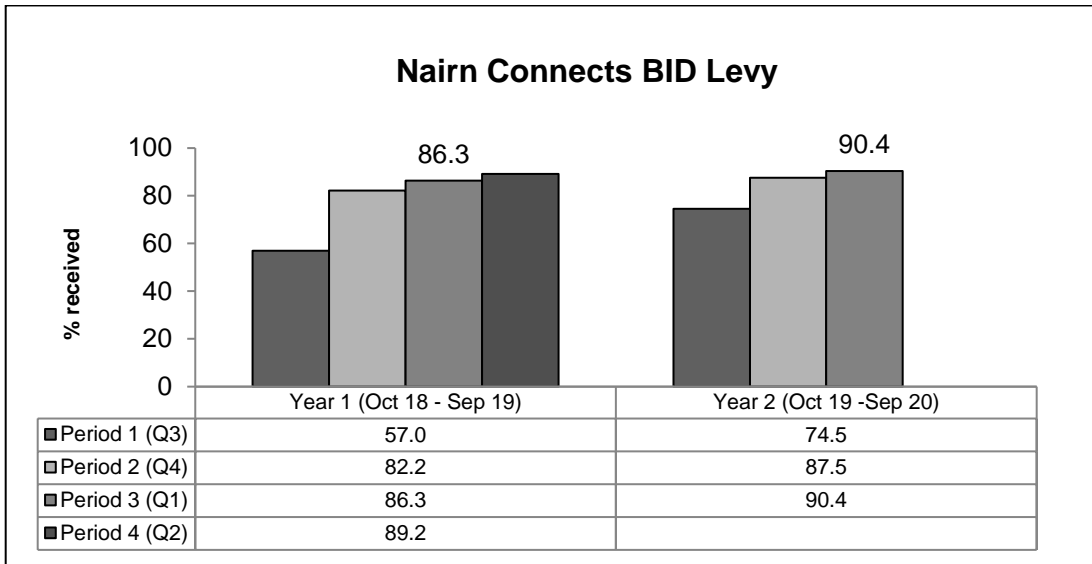
7.5



7.6 ***Nairn Connects BID Levy***

7.7 The Nairn Connects billing year commences 1 October each year. Performance in Period 3 (Q1) shows a collection rate of 90.4%, a 4.1% improvement on prior year.

7.8



7.9 BID Administration Costs

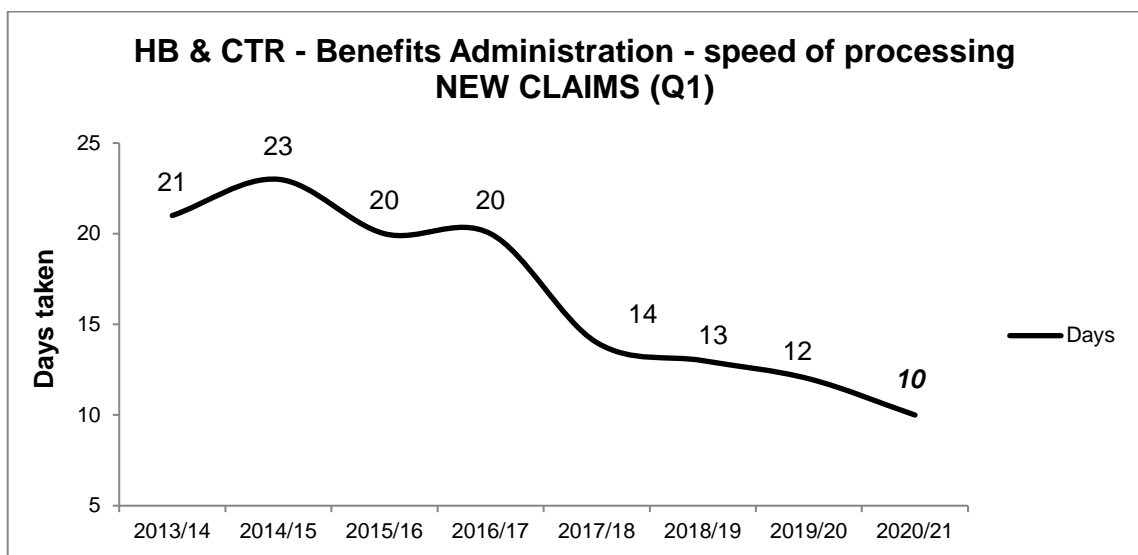
7.10 The Council fully recovers annual collection and administration costs from each BID.

8. Housing Benefit & Council Tax Reduction: Benefits Administration - Speed of processing (days)

8.1 These indicators reflect the Council’s ability to process work as quickly as possible to ensure applicants receive their entitlement on time and at the correct rate.

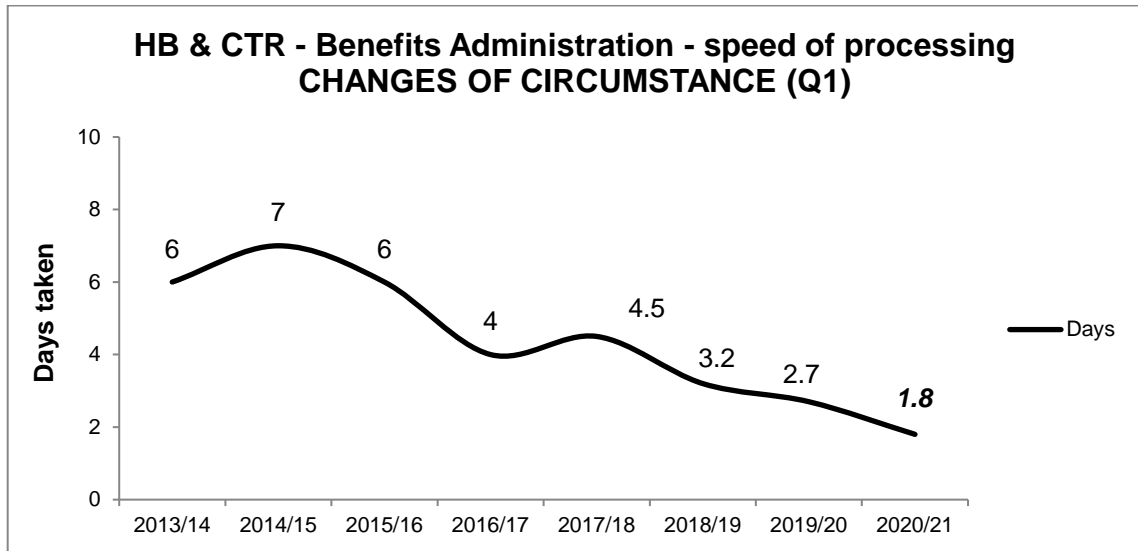
8.2 The figures for June 2020 – and as a result Q1 2020 – had not been published by the Department for Work and Pensions at the time of writing this report. However, April and May 2020 show an average processing speed for new claims of 10 days and 1.8 days for changes of circumstance, both showing a continued improvement on previous years.

8.3



8.4 Prompt processing times for New Claims and Changes in Circumstances are positive for customers as it means they are informed about the outcome of their new claim/change in their circumstances as quickly as possible. This also helps council tax collection levels, supports the Housing Benefit budget and maximises subsidy from the Department for Work and Pensions.

8.5



9. Welfare Support Team

9.1 As set out in the table at paragraph 9.2 below, the Welfare Support Team (formerly Income Maximisation) continues to support customers and maximise benefit awards. In Quarter 1, 2020/21, 288 customers received additional financial gains totalling £1.084m. Of this, £269k relates to backdated awards and £815k to the annualised weekly gain (i.e. the weekly gain multiplied by 52 weeks).

9.2

Financial benefit gains for customers from advice given (£000) (backdated and annualised) – Highland Council, Welfare Support Team								
	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21 Q1
1 Apr–31 March	1,635	3,975	4,015	4,651	6,024	6,188	6,651	1,084

9.3 Performance monitoring of welfare, advice and information services for 2019/20 is also being considered by Members at today's Committee.

9.4 Together, the Council's Welfare Support team and Citizens Advice achieved benefit gains of £23.72m during 2019/20 which has helped local households to pay their bills, have a better quality of life and has wider socio-economic benefits for local businesses and communities.

10. TalentLink (Recruitment)

10.1 The Council uses CoSLA's on-line recruitment system called *TalentLink* which enables applicants to apply online for job roles and enables Council Managers to complete the recruitment process electronically.

10.2

TalentLink	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21 Q1
Number of posts advertised	2,199	2,403	1,914	1,947	1,258	1,346	97
Percentage of posts advertised on time	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number (& percentage) of electronic applications	17,301 95.8%	15,217 95.9%	14,427 95.3%	17,206 97.5%	11,044 97.2%	<i>Data unavailable at time of report</i>	
Percentage of paper applications processed within 2 working days	100%	100%	99.3%	100%	99.7%	100%	100%

11. Single Grant Applications (SGAs)

11.1 The Business Support Team provides support for several Council teams, including Ward Managers, in the administrative process of SGAs. The Team’s role is primarily logging SGAs onto SharePoint, issuing acknowledgments to customers and distributing the SGAs to relevant teams.

11.2 340 single grant applications were received during Q1, 2020/21 of which 98.8% were processed within 5 days.

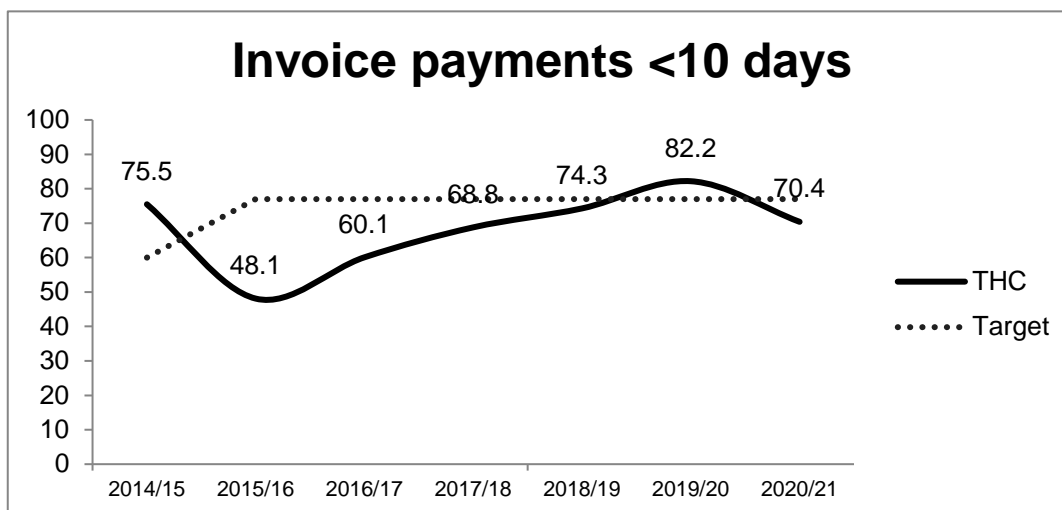
11.3

Single Grant Applications	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 (to date)
Percentage logged, acknowledged & distributed within 5 days	97.7%	97.9%	98.3%	99.2%	96.8%	98.9%	98.8%

12. Payment of Invoices

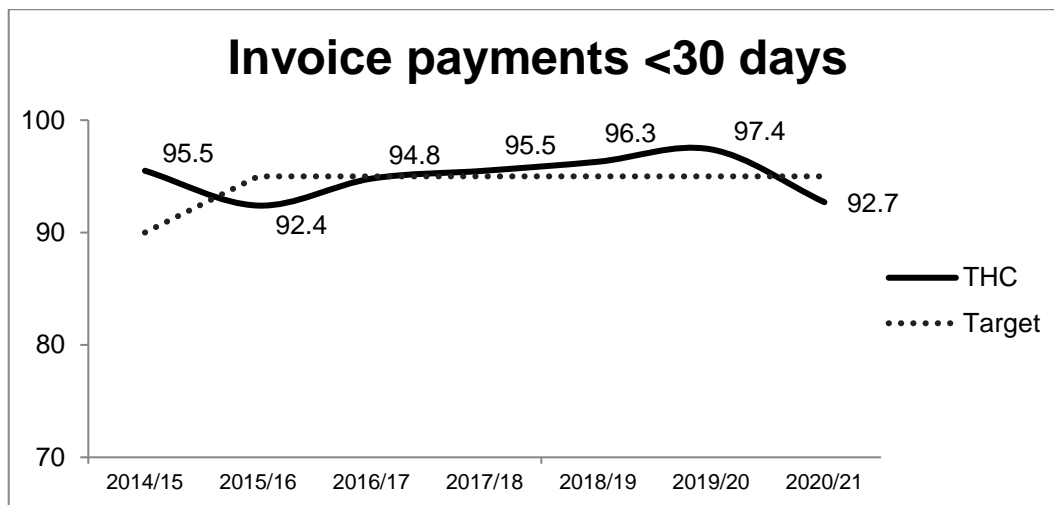
12.1 These indicators measure the Council’s efficiency of paying invoices and analyses the number of invoices paid within 10 days and 30 days of receipt, as a percentage of all invoices paid. Performance at Service level is detailed in **Appendix 2**.

12.2



12.3 Performance in Quarter 1 has reduced compared to prior year, reflecting the resourcing impact of the pandemic. Had the invoices that took 11-13 days been paid within 10 days, this performance would be improved by 9% resulting in performance of 79.4%.

12.4



12.5 Performance for payment within 30 days dipped by 4.7% and is mainly attributable to new demands placed on Services from the pandemic and the need to redirect resources. As reported to previous Committees, teams within the Corporate Resources Service continue to review processes seeking to deliver improvements wherever possible, including the speed of information and approvals from Services to enable invoices to be processed within these target times.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Finance and Resources

Date: 17 July 2020

Authors: Sheila McKandie, Interim Head of Revenues & Customer Services
Caroline Urquhart, Business Management Analyst, Corporate Resources

Background Papers:

- Performance Monitoring – Welfare, Advice and Information Services 2019/20

Appendix 1

Statutory Performance Indicators	Report ref:	Frequency
The average number of working days per employee lost through sickness absence for: b) All other local government employees		Quarterly
The gross administration cost per benefits case		Annual
The cost of collecting Council Tax per dwelling		Annual
Current year income from Council Tax: a) The income due from Council Tax for the year, net of relief and rebates b) The percentage of a) that was received during the year	5.3	Quarterly
The number of invoices paid within 30 calendar days of receipt as a percentage of all invoices paid	12.4	Quarterly
The number of invoices paid within 10 calendar days of receipt as a percentage of all invoices paid	12.2	Quarterly
Internal Audit - cost of audit/£1m net expenditure		Annual
Insurance - cost/claim processed		Annual
Creditors - unit cost/creditor invoice issued		Annual
Payroll - cost/payslip produced		Annual
Pensions - cost per member		Annual
Cost of Accounting % Net Rev Budget + HRA		Annual
Cost of completing the Annual Accounts		Annual
Cost NDR collection/chargeable property		Annual
% NDR collected by year end	6.4	Quarterly
Cost sundry debtors/debtors account issued		Annual
% income sundry debtors collected during year		Annual
Cost Corporate Finance % Net Revenue Budget		Annual
Cost Procurement section % Net Revenue Budget		Annual

Other performance measures	Report ref:	Frequency
Processing time benefit – new claims (average days)	8.3	Quarterly
Processing time benefit – change in circs (average days)	8.5	Quarterly
Welfare Support	9.2	Quarterly
CAB		
Business Improvement District (BID) Levy	7.0	Quarterly
Business Support - Talentlink	10.2	Quarterly
Business Support – Single Grant Applications	11.3	Quarterly

Non Domestic Rates – Important information for 2020/21

Help for Non Domestic Rates payers during the Coronavirus outbreak

A number of reliefs have been introduced by the Scottish Government under The Non Domestic Rates (Coronavirus Reliefs) (Scotland) Regulations) 2020. These reliefs will support non domestic ratepayers during the Coronavirus outbreak and are available for the period **1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021**. No application is necessary, and the relief will be automatically credited to your 2020/21 rates bill if you are eligible.

General relief of 1.6% for non-domestic properties

All properties will receive 1.6% relief on its gross 2020/21 rates bill. This relief will be automatically credited to your rates bill. This relief will be deducted first, before any other relief is deducted from your bill.

Retail Leisure and Hospitality properties

100% rates relief is available to non domestic properties in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. Eligibility is based on the property being **wholly or mainly** used for qualifying purposes as set out in Schedule 1 of The Non Domestic Rates (Coronavirus Reliefs) (Scotland) Regulations 2020. Details are available at this link: legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2020/101/made. In order to qualify for relief, the Scottish Government requires that the property **must** have been occupied on 17 March 2020 for a qualifying purpose. For the avoidance of doubt, lands and heritages which are restricted temporarily due to the government's advice on COVID 19 should be treated as occupied for the purposes of this relief.

Aviation property

Relief is available for property at and used as airports throughout Scotland, situated at such airports and used for handling services or occupied by Loganair Ltd, company registration number SC170072. This relief does not require an application and is available to all eligible properties.

COVID 19 Business grants

As part of its response to the COVID-19 emergency, the Scottish Government is making grants available for certain businesses. Further information is available at www.highland.gov.uk/coronavirus/businessgrant

New information for Non Domestic Rates 2020/21

Introduction of Intermediate Poundage by the Scottish Government

The Scottish Government's non domestic rates poundage rate for 2020/21 is 49.8p.

From 1 April 2020 an intermediate poundage of 51.1p is introduced for properties with rateable values from £51,001 to £95,000.

For properties with rateable values in excess of £95,000 the supplement poundage is 2.6p.

Summary of the Scottish Government's Poundage Rates 2020/21	
Rateable value	Poundage rate
Properties with rateable values up to £51,000	49.8p
Properties with rateable values between £51,001 and £95,000	51.1p
Properties with rateable values of £95,001 and above	52.4p

- **Transitional Relief**

The transitional relief scheme is continuing into 2020/21 for eligible hospitality sector property with a rateable value not exceeding £1,500,000. As per The Non Domestic Rates (Transitional Relief) Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2020, the increase in gross liability from 2016/17 to 2020/21 is capped at 74.7%. If the increase in your gross rates liability from 2016/17 to 2020/21 is less than 74.7% you will not qualify for transitional relief in 2020/21.

Please note that you need to reapply for transitional relief in 2020/21. Reapplication is necessary as the Scottish Government requires all applicants to complete a state aid declaration. You can reapply at: www.highland.gov.uk/transitionalrelief

New applications for transitional relief can only be considered from 1 April 2020 onwards.

- **Small Business Bonus** relief is restricted to **occupied** properties only from 1 April 2020. Please note that both occupied and unoccupied properties must be declared on your application. Further information is available from the Non Domestic Rates Team (see below for contact details).
- **Renewable energy relief**
60% relief is available for qualifying Hydro Schemes. **If you have previously qualified for relief please note that reapplication is necessary for 2020/21** as the Scottish Government requires all applicants to complete a state aid declaration. Application forms and further information can be found at: www.highland.gov.uk/businessratesdiscounts
Information about state aid is available at: www.gov.scot/publications/state-aid-guidance/
- **New and improved property relief**
New and improved relief is continuing into 2020/21. Please contact the Non Domestic Rates Team for further information.
- **Enterprise Area Relief** – is continuing to 31 March 2022. Re-application is not necessary at the present time.
- **Reverse Vending Machine Relief** - 100% relief is available for machines that take returns of single-use containers in the context of the Deposit Return Scheme. Please contact the Non Domestic Rates Team for further information.
- **Unoccupied/Empty Property Relief** – From 1 April 2020 the period of occupation between 2 claims for unoccupied property relief will be increased from 6 weeks to 6 months. In effect, for the purposes of calculating empty property relief entitlement, a property is treated as if it had been unoccupied during any period of occupation that ended within six calendar months of when it started.

Further information on reliefs and changes to legislation can be found at www.highland.gov.uk/nondomesticrates.

Application forms for other reliefs, for example, small business bonus are available at: www.highland.gov.uk/businessratesdiscounts.

Contact details for the Non Domestic Rates Team

Email: nondomesticrates@highland.gov.uk or **telephone** 01463 702984

Invoice Payments <10 days									
Service	TARGET 20/21	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21 Q1
C&L	77%		67.4	49.2	57.6	65.7	66.1	72.2	65.3
CD			72.0	71.3	75.1	78.2			
CEX			84.0	75.2	76.7	72.5	77.3	70.4	76.2
CS			75.6	62.8	65.8	76.4	81.4	83.1	74.6
D&I			85.0	51.0	55.8	65.3	67.2	50.8	51.1
Fin			91.0	76.8	91.4	83.0			
CRS							77.7	85.6	90.1
Highland Council			73.4	76.9	56.5	63.3	71.1	73.7	75.3

Invoice Payments <30 days									
Service	TARGET 20/21	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21 Q1
C&L	95%		93.7	89.7	94.5	94.9	93.8	95.0	91.0
CD			93.6	93.1	92.8	94.5			
CEX			95.4	96.1	94.1	92.3	94.8	92.1	96.8
CS			91.8	92.9	93.1	95.4	97.0	97.4	94.2
D&I			90.6	88.4	91.7	95.4	96.7	92.1	87.0
Fin			99.0	96.9	98.1	98.9			
CRS							97.5	98.2	97.2
Highland Council			93.3	94.3	91.3	94.0	95.3	95.7	95.9