1. Report of the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Improvement (Page 2)

2. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement (Page 6)

3. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing (Page 9)

4. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Regeneration (Page 12)

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6. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Performance & Support (Page 17)

7. Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance (Page 19)
Local Enterprise Partnerships

In my July report to Council I described the opportunity for the Borough to apply to Government to be part of a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). At the 28th July Cabinet meeting the Leader and the Chief Executive were given authority to sign up to LEPs that were in the best interest of Northampton.

Over the summer months I have taken part in a wide variety of discussions with colleagues on the Public Service Board, representatives of local Businesses and colleagues in neighbouring authorities some of whom were members of the MKSM partnership.

A key aspect of the discussions has been the need to understand the expectations of Government in terms of the roles that LEP’s will be expected to perform. Guidance from central Government has been limited but it is clear that a LEP should represent “a functional economic area”, contain at least two strategic authorities, and have a critical mass in terms of population.

As leader of the council I have now indicated our support for the emerging South East Midlands LEP proposal which has is also being supported by Corby, Daventry, Kettering and South Northants as well as neighbouring authorities to the south namely Milton Keynes, Bedford Aylesbury Vale and Central Bedford. Luton and Cherwell are also supporting this proposal.

I believe that a good case can be made to Government that this area represents a functional economic area, will contribute fully to the growth agenda, lead the recovery of UK PLC and will have the size and stature to sit alongside other LEPs such as greater Manchester, Birmingham etc where economic geography is easier to identify.

The County Council had expressed an interest and prepared a detailed case for being part of a Northamptonshire / Leicestershire/Warwickshire LEP submission but this has not secured the support of the other Councils or local businesses. The County Council has therefore submitted a LEP proposal based on Northamptonshire alone which was not shared with the Borough or other district Councils prior to submission.

I have expressed the view to the County Council that we do not believe that Northamptonshire alone represented a natural economic area, it would not have the critical mass required, and would therefore not meet the Governments requirement nor provide a body to assist businesses in Northampton to thrive and create jobs.
I will continue to maintain a dialogue with the County to persuade them of the advantages of the SEM LEP as the best way forward for Northampton and therefore Northamptonshire as the key economic centre for the County.

I believe that central Government will be responding quickly to LEP applications which need to be submitted by the 6th September and so I hope to update the council on progress at the October meeting.

**Progress of Northampton’s Sporting Club**

The Cricket Club are drawing towards the end of another season and our two winter sporting clubs are just starting their new fixture lists. The Borough Council recognises the value to the town of successful sports clubs and is committed to do everything within its powers and resources to support the local clubs. The Borough Council formally recognised the contribution of the Saints to the Town when they awarded the Club Honorary Freedom of the Borough in 2004.

The Board of the Saints Rugby Club have made it known for some time that they are keen to further expand the facilities at Franklins Gardens by the redevelopment of the Sturridge Pavilion end of the stadium to increase the capacity to c 17,500. I am pleased to see from their financial results that they were profitable in 9/10 and I wish them well for this season.

To enable the club to continue to grow and to keep Northampton on the sporting map the Borough Council would welcome for consideration a planning application for the Sturtridge Pavilion. The plans were initially unveiled in 2009 and the submission of a planning application is the first and essential step to enable the Saints Rugby club to play in a 17K seat stadium in the 2011/12 season.

**Preparation for the 2011/12 Budget**

The Finance Portfolio Holder details the internal work that is in progress to prepare the 2011/12 budget. This authority, alongside all other Public Bodies, face a significant reduction in our grants over the next Comprehensive Spending Review which will be announced on 20th October. The anticipated reduction of 25% to 40% in our Rate Support grant will require a fundamental review of the priorities and services offered by this Authority.

There is a need to communicate the magnitude of this challenge to our residents and the Cabinet are planning to attend Ward meetings and Forums between September and December to outline the potential financial impact and to understand the public’s priorities.

This consultation will form part of the development of the next Corporate Plan which will need to reflect the changed Financial Landscape within which the Borough will need to operate from 2011 to 2014.
**Borough Solicitors**

**Shared Services**

The Borough Solicitor is actively pursuing shared services opportunities for the department in order to save costs and increase efficiencies. Meetings with a number of public service organisations have already taken place with one set of discussions being at a relatively advanced stage.

**Information Governance**

The Information Governance Team have been assisting with the document/file storage element of the Cliftonville project advising on the storage and archiving of council documents. The basement archive project is more cost effective for the Council than the alternative of storing records off-site where recovery of documents from storage is an expensive process.

You may have seen some of the documents uncovered during the review process in the local press. In addition all the horticultural town cups are to be rehoused in the central museum

**Land Charges**

On 27th July Central Government announced that it was reducing the fee for a personal search of the Local Land Charges Register from £22 to £0 with effect from 17th August 2010. As a result our Land Charges income for this year will be cut by around £43,000.

The announcement did not stop there. It went on to suggest that Councils should consider refunding the personal search fees collected since January 2005. For Northampton Borough Council this would represent approximately £228,000. The reduction in the fee and suggestion of refunds is the Governments response to the incompatibility of two pieces of legislation introduced by the last administration.

The current proposals place a burden on local authorities to maintain records and provide information Free of Charge to commercial companies. I have written to our Local MPs alerting them to the impact on our already stretched budget and pointing out the potential impact on other front line services valued by our Council tax payers which may now be under threat.
This administration believes that it should continue to provide a good service in support of housing transactions but should not be expected to fund this service from our General Fund effectively picking up legitimate expenses of private companies.

Brian Hoare
Leader of the Council
Portfolio Holder for Partnerships & Improvements
Community Safety

Consultation on proposed revised byelaws for the Borough, that address issues of low-level anti-social behaviour, is now complete. Some 150 responses were received. A final report is being presented to Council.

A stakeholder’s day to review the Countywide Alcohol Strategy and develop a local delivery plan took place in July. A wide range of agencies both statutory and voluntary, representatives from local businesses and young people attended the event. The delivery plan is now being drafted and will be presented to the Local Strategic Partnership later this year.

August has been a busy month for the Community Safety Partnership, with the launch of a number of projects for young people to address issues of alcohol related violent crime. The Stay Safe Scheme, which targets vulnerable young people, was launched on 13th August 2010. This was followed by extended diversionary activities and youth outreach work on Friday and Saturday evenings, and specialist group work for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse led by Women’s Aid. In addition to this the test purchasing operations for alcohol sales have been extended to also cover the sale of knives.

The Bridge Street Closure was extended to incorporate Bank Holiday Sunday, 29th August.

Leisure Services

Trilogy Health & Fitness direct debit memberships continue to rise and are up 10% on the previous year.

The Government Free Swimming Initiative drew to a close at the end of July. However under 16s continued to swim free of charge in NBC Leisure Facilities until the end of August provided they were Leisure Card holders. Customers have generally accepted this once the situation has been explained. From 1 September 2010, under 16s can swim for £1.00 with a Leisure Card.

Northampton Sports & Play Development Team

Over 3,000 people attended the National Playday event held on the 4th August in Abington Park. The free event was organised by the Play Development
Team as part of the Big Lottery funded Northampton Improved Places to Play programme. Over 40 community groups were involved in the delivery of a variety of play opportunities for 4-16 year olds.

3 members of the Sports and Play Development Team have passed a Level 6 Module from the Anglia Ruskin University called "Leading Professional Practice" which meets the Children's Workforce Development Council learning outcomes for a course in "Leadership and Management in Playwork in the context of Integrated Services".

The Northampton Street Football Project has been awarded £25,000 by Northamptonshire County Council Integrated & Targeted Youth Services Commissioner for Children and Young Peoples Department - Extended Services.

The Sports and Play Development Team have been allocated £10,000 funding from the Northampton Community Safety Partnership. The funding will be used to provide a range of diversionary activities in priority wards across the Borough.

**Events**

Events hosted included Live World Cup Football, the Artist Led Intervention 'Blink Festival', Arts and Antiques Markets, live evening concerts and the installation of the Pride of Northampton. There was an 18% increase in footfall through the Square in June, and a 6% increase in July.

Highlight events include, ‘Has Northamptonshire Got Talent’ Grand Final and a visit from CBBC’s Live, a speciality Fine Foods Market and Deadly Road show in September. The Market Square will soon be able to provide free Wi-Fi Internet access to visitors.

The Pride of Northampton lions will be leaving the streets of Northampton on September 5th and will be auctioned on the evening of 23rd September 2010. The auction will be held at The Park Inn Hotel, Silver Street, Northampton. Tickets are available via the Born Free website: [http://www.bornfree.org.uk/shop/acatalog/events.html](http://www.bornfree.org.uk/shop/acatalog/events.html). There are 2 types of ticket available: £45, which includes a 3-course meal, and £10 for the auction only.

Events throughout the summer held on NBC open space and parkland has totalled 115 events, including a variety of events from ‘Monster’ Trucks, Boot Camps, Dragon Boat races, ‘Bands in the Park’ and ‘Shakespeare in the Park’.

**Museums & Arts**

At the Northamptonshire Heritage Awards, on 22nd July, Northampton Museum & Art Gallery won a Judges ‘Special Award’ for their work with young people and for putting on challenging exhibitions such as "Skin", which is about leather trades. In September 2010, there will be Regional Awards, where the ‘best of the best’ will be judged and where we hope our museums will also fare well.

July was a busy time for the Museum service with 11,866 visitors coming
through doors at Northampton Museum & Art Gallery. The comparative figures for this and previous years are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Visitor Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>11,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>9,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>9,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>9,206 (NB from July 2007 onwards a deduction of 788 per month was made for staff/contractors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>10,080</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On 23rd July 2010, the Shoe Town Festival was launched. On Saturday 31st July 2010, the Friends of Northampton Museum and Art Galleries held their Annual Summer Party at Stowe Park Pavilions.

At the ‘Family Fun Day’ hosted by Abington Park Museum on Saturday, 14 August 2010, despite the appalling weather, there were 977 visitors through the door. Good weather at last year’s Family Fun Day generated 1314 visits.

**Community Centres**

The Cabinet Advisory Group has met and considered the framework document which forms the basis of future policy on the management of community centres. It was a very productive meeting and the group is earmarked to convene again in mid-September.

**Paul Varnsverry**
Deputy Leader of the Council
Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement
Housing Inspection

It was reported to Council in May 2010 that an inspection would take place in October 2010 but recent announcements about the future of the Audit Commission and Tenant Services Authority (TSA) leave a question mark over the timing and nature of a future housing inspection. We do know that the Audit Commission has not yet included Northampton in the programme of 2010/11 inspections on their website but this cannot be taken as confirmation that an inspection will not take place in some form. The TSA continue to monitor our progress very closely in specific areas and there is a chance that there may be a short notice inspection of our housing service (only 2 working days notice) focussing on specific areas.

Places of Change

A Start on Site ceremony took place on the 10th September 2010 with housing group Midland Heart and development firm William Davis, who have been appointed as contractors to deliver the scheme, in attendance. The scheme, is a partnership venture between NBC, the Homes and Communities Agency, The County Council (Supporting People) and a number of local agencies that help and support homeless people. Places of Change will significantly improve the accommodation and support services available in the town for homeless people.

Homelessness

Using year on year comparisons the continuing downturn in the economic climate has resulted in a 41% increase in the number of people approaching the council for housing advice, gateway support and new applications for housing. Positive joint working with NCC Children’s Services has resulted in funding to NBC to deploy 9 officers to the Gateway Service from September 2010, to provide a seamless service for 16 to 17 year old customers. Recruitment to these positions within NCC has now been completed and the officers will be based at the Guildhall.

Housing website developments

The website is an important way of giving our customers information and an alternative means of accessing our services. A full review of our housing pages has been carried out to ensure it delivers what is required. The housing homepage has been made more user-friendly and many of the pages now carry images to improve
the look and feel of the site. The content has been updated and some new areas have been added – such as decent homes information and services for leaseholders. There is now a consultation section and events diary to publicise meetings, forums and drop-ins that are scheduled.

**Online Services**

Customers can now do more business with us online with a suite of online forms to allow them to request and apply for certain services. Tenants can now view their rent account on line and applicants can view the status of their housing application. Development work is also underway to enable customers to complete the housing application form online. As well as providing our customers with an improved and more accessible service there will be savings for the council in associated costs. It is proposed that the online application form will automatically feed directly into the IBS system which will save time and allow customers to start bidding more quickly.

**New Tenancy Agreements**

With the issuing of the final formal notice of variation all legal requirements have now been met and all tenants are now managed under the new tenancy agreement. Photographic tenancies are now fully operational with photographs of new tenants being taken at sign-up by Housing Officers. This reduces the risk of fraud and illegal sub-letting.

**Tenant Training Programme**

The new Tenant Training Programme was launched in July with the first session on Freedom of Information being delivered by NBC’s Information Management Team. The aims of the programme are to: encourage tenant/leaseholder involvement to improve the housing service, support tenancy sustainment and develop knowledge and life skills. The first programme, which ran from July to September, was very well attended with one or two of the courses being over-subscribed. Feedback from tenants has been excellent and can be evidenced by the course evaluation scores. Places are already booked on the autumn training programme which begins in October.

**Council commended in National Awards**

The Council was commended at a national awards ceremony that recognises excellence in public sector communications. The commendation was in the ‘most innovative use of call centre technology’ for the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Since the introduction of CBL two years ago we have housed around 2,500 single people and families and the scheme has been expanded to include housing association homes and council-approved private rented accommodation. The straightforwardness of the scheme for customers, its accessibility and additional
features were recognised by the awarding body as being key to its success.

**Eastfield and Thorplands (Northampton East) Regeneration Scheme**

Following the Council's submission of its Revised Expression of Interest in January 2010 to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the Council is currently earmarked to potentially receive £100 million in PFI credits from the Government to enable the delivery of improvements and regeneration on the Eastfield and Thorplands estates through a Public Private Partnership over the next 30 years. Resident Steering Groups of volunteer tenants, leaseholders and homeowners are now working closely with the Council to develop the schemes Outline Business Case which is planned to be submitted to the HCA should it get Cabinet approval on the 3rd November 2010.

**Supporting People Funding**

The County Council will be considering proposals for the future of Support funding at their September Cabinet. We are concerned that any reduction in the current levels of Supporting People grant that we receive from the County Council will impact on some of our most vulnerable customers and in particular, the Sheltered Housing service.

**Sheltered Housing report to Cabinet**

A report is due to come to Cabinet later this week which will propose full consultation with all residents and stakeholders of Sheltered Housing in order to address key issues around costs, models of service delivery and condition of property. This consultation will run through the Autumn and recommendations on the way forward for Sheltered Housing will come back to Cabinet in February.

*Sally Beardsworth*
Portfolio Holder for Housing
Grosvenor Greyfriars

Work on bringing forward the redevelopment of the Grosvenor Centre and Greyfriars bus station is progressing with 4 major work streams.

1. Structural maintenance of the car park. Cabinet approved capital funding earlier this year for work to tackle structural improvement issues that are the responsibility of the council, and are necessary for the project to proceed. The specialist contract will be awarded soon.

2. Bus layover for Stagecoach. The council are negotiating with Stagecoach the in principle terms for Stagecoach to surrender their lease on the bus station and re-locate their layover facility. Stagecoach have planning permission for a site on Far Cotton for a new maintenance and layover facility.

3. New Bus passenger facility. The County Council have been considering alternative locations for a new bus interchange. It is important that any new location is central, convenient and safe to bus users day and night, and integrates well with the town centre street scene. Interim facilities will also need to be considered and agreed as work progresses and these will be determined as part of the pre-application discussions.

4. The Council continues to make the case that the Grosvenor/Greyfriars redevelopment shows a better return on any public investment in terms of generating economic activity and promoting jobs than any other town centre regeneration project under consideration. We continue to work closely with colleagues in the County Council, WNDC and of course Legal and General in order to enable the project to progress.

5. I will shortly be attending, together with officers of the County and Borough Councils and WNDC an away day organised by Legal and General.

St. Johns

The Council is working with its preferred development partner (Deeley's) to secure investors in the St. Johns redevelopment. This may involve a mix of different uses that need to form a cohesive whole that add to the arts, cultural and employment vision for the area envisaged by the masterplan. Funding an innovation centre for small high tech companies is being pursued by WNDC and the University with the support of NBC. Other potential interest includes office based employment, family orientated restaurant and bar facilities, hotel and student accommodation.
Central Area Action Plan

The pre-submission draft of the CAAP is due to be presented to cabinet in October. Thank you to all those councillors who have attended workshops over the summer to help develop the plan.

A key component of the CAAP is the future of Spring Boroughs. This project is to be community led and special efforts are being made to ensure the close involvement of this diverse community so as to develop a Master Plan that has wide support and ownership. Councillors have also expressed a strong wish for cross party working on the future of Spring Boroughs, but with the pivotal focus on the community groups and with that in mind we have established a member panel comprising of ward councillors, key cabinet members and opposition representatives. All major projects require sound governance but the terms of reference for each group are still to be fully discussed and agreed. Improving the quality of housing and the local environment in an area which contains a high level of deprivation is a key element of the regeneration of the town centre and of the improvement of the council’s housing stock. I am pleased that we have put in place both the policy platform and priority to kick start this key project.

Richard Church
Portfolio Holder for Planning & Regeneration
Regulatory Services

As part of the Action Earth initiative, a ‘community clean-up’ took place on Sunday, 18th July 2010, working in partnership with Queens Park Residents Association.

The Environmental Wardens have also been working with the Probation Service to arrange works to clear the graveyard in Holy Sepulchre Church and also clean up works in Rectory Farm.

Environmental Crime

During August the Environmental Crime Officers took part in a multi-agency operation to crack down on doorstep crime and rogue trader activity. Lorries, cars and vans suspected of carrying waste were targeted, checking that drivers were aware of, and complying with the law. This was a really beneficial operation and sent a strong message to people that the regulations around the disposal of waste and prevention of fly tipping will be robustly enforced.

Carbon Reduction

On 27 August the Market Square hosted the ‘Green, Safe and Healthy Northampton’ day. Information stands, advice from experts and a range of activities, displays, competitions and other things to see or get involved in were on offer. Practical help and advice on how to reduce your carbon footprint, be more energy efficient and save money was available. Also on offer was help and advice about what you can do to make your home safer and more secure as well as how to improve your health and fitness levels through everyday activities or through local clubs and groups.

Neighbourhood Environmental Services

Streets and Grounds

We are actively participating in the Neighbourhood Working Partnership meetings. Summer pruning and mowing is in full swing. Current joint initiatives include the fly-tipping scheme on Lings and Goldings, and the joint scheme with the Wardens/Environmental Protection team, Community Payback and NES to clear fly tipping and refuse from Skid Ally on Kingsheath.
Parks & Open Spaces

Judging has now taken place for both the East Midlands in Bloom and Britain in Bloom Competitions. The result will be announced during the awards ceremonies at the Guildhall on the 15 September for East Midlands in Bloom and for Britain in Bloom at the Centennial Centre in Birmingham on 29 September.

‘I Love my Park’

This scheme has been launched. Extra litter pickers are working each weekend, and particularly when the weather is kind to us. The additional recycling bins for paper, glass and plastic/cans will be installed during early September following delivery from the manufacturer. Special child-friendly penguin-shaped bins are in place near the ice cream vans. Council grounds and parks staff will be on duty all day on Saturdays and Sundays during the summer months. We will be promoting this scheme in various ways, at events, in the media and on our website. Letters have also been sent to Friends of, resident and community groups informing them of the scheme.

Waste Services

For the period April to July, the cumulative recycling rate was 41.7 % against the target for the year of 40.40 %. Dry recyclables were slightly over the profile for the period. Garden waste collections remain efficient with vehicles and crew working to capacity, however due to the recent spell of dry weather the tonnages collected have been less than expected.

The Northamptonshire Waste Partnership Door Stepping campaign to increase kerbside recycling is currently underway with officers and volunteers inspecting streets within the Borough for participation rates and contamination levels before collections. Residents that do appear to have participated have been approached to ensure that they still have their recycling boxes and where necessary replacements are being provided. Of the 9,000 properties initially door stepped we made contact with 35%. We are now in the third phase of the campaign where we are revisiting the streets to assess whether recycling has increased.

Town Centre Operations

The Council continues to promote Northampton Market and looks to attract new traders to expand the current offer available. Working with local town centre businesses to promote activities and events play a key part in raising the town’s profile and image. The market square supports local charities and recently held a dog show that raised over £950 for Animals in Need.
**Town Centre Partnership**

The Business Plan for Town Centre BID will be officially launched on the 8th September at the Royal & Derngate and local town centre businesses will be invite to attend. The proposal will detail the reasons for the BID, the benefits to local businesses and the town as well as the levy charges each business will have to pay.

The official ballot will be held in October with ballot papers being sent out during September. The Steering Group made up from town centre businesses are confident that the BID proposal offers the town a positive way forward.

**Trini Crake**  
Portfolio Holder for the Environment
Customer Services & ICT

Facilities

A wedding brochure has been launched to publicise the Guildhall as a wedding venue. This will support the increase in business which has been generated by the web site. Customer feedback from wedding attendees this year has been exceptional. A Wedding Fair is being held in September.

Customer Services

An integrated appointment booking and queue management system has been launched in the One Stop Shop ahead of the full refurbishment. Initial feedback from customers is extremely positive. The system has reduced wait times even further, customers can now see on the screens, as well as hear which ticket numbers are being called. Staff now spend less time inputting data and find the look and feel of the system quicker and easier to use.

Customer consultation in relation to the One Stop Shop will be taking place during September. We will have architects plans and artists impressions alongside examples of best practice to ensure that all customers and stakeholders, including members, have an opportunity to comment ahead of the final design decision, so please take the opportunity to pop in and have a look and complete the survey. The project is on track to deliver the re-modelled One Stop Shop early next year.

ICT

A new area for the website has been developed which will make it very easy for customers to find out who their Councillor is and to contact them. The new page is being further developed to enable direct reporting and mapping of faults.

http://selfserve.northampton.gov.uk/mycouncil/

Human Resources

Firstcare - a new nurse lead absence reporting service - all staff now report their absence to an external absence line. This ensures that the employee receives initial medical advice when they report their absence. The manager is then informed
of their absence by Firstcare immediately via email or text. The benefit to the employee is initial medical advice, and the benefits to the authority include moving to a paperless absence system. It is also hoped that this will help support the authorities target of reducing absence to 10 days absence per employee per year, which on the first quarter we are on target to achieve. This would be a reduction in absence by 1.5 days.

**Recruitment system** - An electronic recruitment system has been launched this month which again supports the initiative to move towards a paperless system. This is part of a larger project that NBC is working on with other Northamptonshire authorities to launch a recruitment portal for all local government jobs - this portal will be ready by Jan 2011 and will include a on line application form.

In July I reported on the final stage implementation of the departmental re-organisation. Councillor Mildren asked a supplementary question about temporary staff. There were a small number of posts which were filled by temporary staff whilst the outcome of the restructures was awaited, those posts will have now been filled with staff who relocated.

**Performance**

Following questions from councillors and members of the public, both at Council and public forums, the Performance Management Team and service providers are carrying out a wide ranging review to guarantee that all reports of fly tips on public land are captured and removed. This will enable us to provide a consistent level of service across the town.

**Councillor Brian Markham**
Portfolio Holder for Performance & Support
Finance and Assets

**Final Accounts 2009/10:** The draft accounts were presented with the Annual Governance Statement to the Audit Committee on 28th June and were approved for external audit. They will be presented again to the Audit Committee in September post audit. The feedback so far from our external auditors is positive, with well-prepared working papers leading to minimal queries.

**Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) Use of Resources:** As you are aware, the inspection has ceased and we will not receive the scores from the Audit Commission. We will however still receive feedback on the assessment work they carried out.

**Budget Monitoring:** The latest monitoring position was reported to Cabinet in July, in the new dashboard format. This was the first monitoring report of the financial year so it is still very early days. As usual the financial position will be carefully monitored.

**Budget:** The first key deadlines have now passed where budget information was due back from directorates to Finance by the 20th August. The Finance Team are now working through the budget papers submitted. The draft budget for consultation will be approved at Cabinet in December.

**Project Support:** The Finance Team are keen to support the success of projects and are currently involved with the board and project groups covering, Carbon Management, Customer Services, Assets, Leisure Trust, Housing PFI, Housing IBS System, Pay and Grading and the Environmental Services Project Board, to name a few.

**Assets**
Following Cabinet approval for the disposal of the initial tranche of assets put forward by the Corporate Asset Board these are now being actively marketed. A further tranche of assets will be considered by Cabinet on 15th September.

Asset management are advising on the framework agreement to be used in
connection with Community Centres and other assets used by community groups.

Revenue and Benefits

Work during July has focused on commencing projects and timescales for their delivery. This has been completed with a decision on the progression of projects by the middle of August. These projects deal with further service improvements aimed at improving customer service and becoming more efficient. Commencement has been delayed whilst we review budget options for 2011/12 as these could have implications to planned activity. Projects focus on delivering more for the same cost or at a reduced cost.

Key achievements during the last period have included:

- Performance of the benefit team has been improving during July and the early part of August and is now 2 days above target.

- The Corporate debt policy was agreed at cabinet in July and alongside a fair approach to debt recovery will be one of the driving forces behind service improvement in income and debt collection.

- Direct Debit take up continues at record levels and at the end of July was 64%. This represents over 52,000 individual accounts paying by the method.

Revenues Summary

Collection at the end of July 2010 was at 38.80%. This is 0.60% down on our target in 2010/11. We continue to utilise all recovery methods available to the Council to ensure that we continue to maximise collection despite the difficulties caused by the financial downturn. Benchmarking performance with other Council’s is underway in order to identify any potential improvements we can make, however as detailed above we do continue to utilise all methods available to the Council.

Benefits Summary

Performance in benefits continues to be within our target for the year at an average of 10 days across all assessment. Our target for 2010 / 11 is 12 days (14 days in 2009/10). Whist the live benefit caseload did show a small decrease at the end of July 2010, the overall caseload has still increased during the first three months of the financial year. We have been undertaking analysis into the effect this has on benefit expenditure and the subsidy we claim back against this expenditure. This work will inform on budgets for 2011/12. As previously reported we continue to work on introducing new processes to reduce our time to process “changes in circumstances” we are specifically testing electronic forms that will remove some duplication of work within the back office. Long-term plans for web based electronic forms are also
undertaken and we are liaising with our software supplier to ascertain what will be required to deliver this aim.

**Northamptonshire Area Procurement Service**

A great deal of focus is currently being made on delivering cashable efficiencies evenly amongst NAPS members. Inevitably some early successes have focused on Daventry and Northampton but NAPS savings are now beginning to be forecast more widely amongst the other NAPS partners.

Savings are being delivered for all five NAPS partners as a result of undertaking flexible procurement for the supply of electricity and gas with a current annual forecast of £150,000 savings in 2010/2011.

Use is now being made of the spend analysis system funded by the Northamptonshire Improvement and Efficiency Partnership to generate further savings by looking at particular spend categories such as vehicles and analysing areas where high numbers of invoices are received.

**David Perkins**  
Portfolio Holder for Finance