



## Finance (and Information Technology) Department



The Finance Department's intention is to contribute towards achieving the aim of attempting "the best for the people of Gwynedd during a difficult period" by:

Ensuring the appropriate support to the Council's business operation and its services when managing, safeguarding and developing its financial position, in order to establish a sustainable community in an open, accountable and prominent manner.

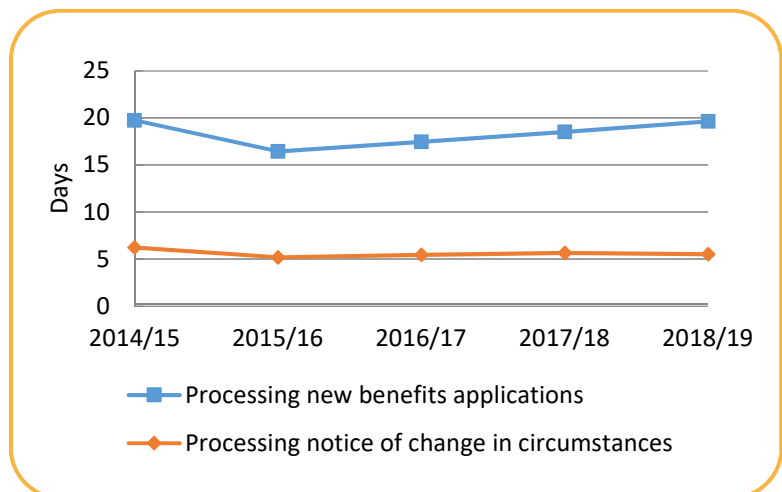
Ensuring professional supportive guidance and technology of a high standard that promotes the Council's basic values and encourages entrepreneurship.

Providing front line services (such as collecting revenue and paying benefits) of a suitable quality to the customer, providing fairness to people and communities, and focusing on residents.

### Benefits Service

We administrate benefit support to approximately 7,500 tenants to pay their rents, and to approximately 10,000 individuals, couples or families to pay their Council Tax bill, aiming to do this in a timely and accurate manner.

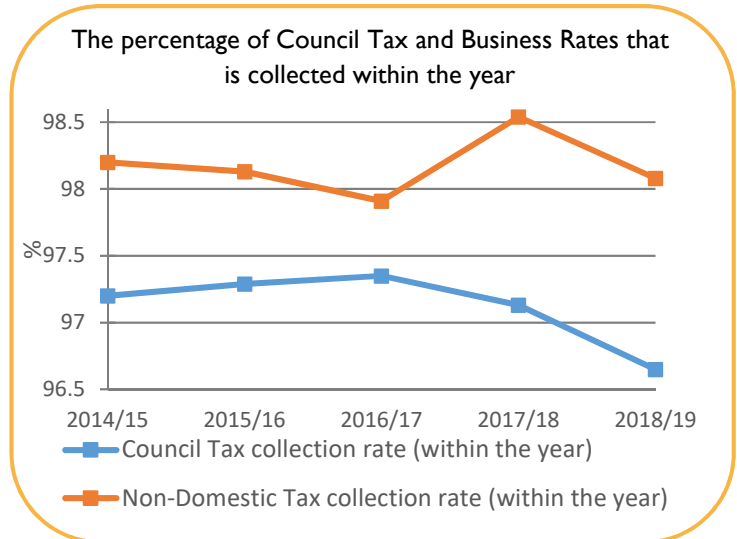
It can be seen from the graph that the number of days it takes us to pay has started to increase until 2019; however, efforts to reduce the number of days are starting to bear fruition, and we will attempt to reduce the number of days further in future.



***In 2020/21, we will continue to train staff and business plan based on the expected number of transfers to Universal Credit. Jointly with other authorities, we will lobby the Government so that the level of demand for services from the Council will continue above the projections. Despite losing the funding available to offer personal budgeting support and digital support, it is expected that enquiries from the public will continue. On the whole, arrangements are going smoothly and therefore the likelihood of substantial decline in the service provided is now relatively low.***

## Taxation Service

Without Council Tax and Business Rates, the Council would not be able to provide its services. This service administrates and collects Council Tax for over 61,500 properties, and Business Rates (Non-domestic Rates) of approximately 7,500 business properties in the most timely and efficient manner as possible, including administrating the various available discounts, exemptions and release schemes.



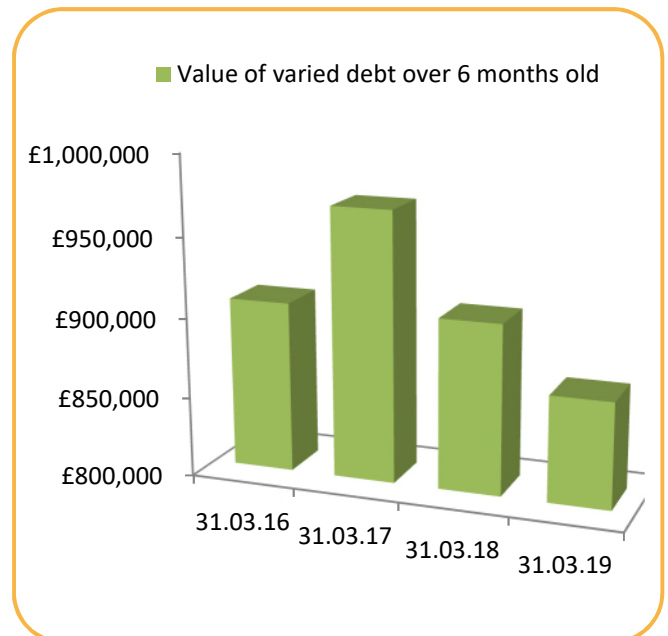
We fully understand that it is not easy for everyone to pay these taxes, and we attempt to be flexible (e.g. encourage payment arrangements and agreements) and sympathetic to the individuals' circumstances. We attempt to encourage individuals to ask for advice on personal financing and more extensive debt advice.

***The transfer of holiday units from the Council Tax system to non-domestic rates remains a financial risk. In 2020/21, we will continue to respond pro-actively to influence Welsh Government, including pressing for a legislative change.***

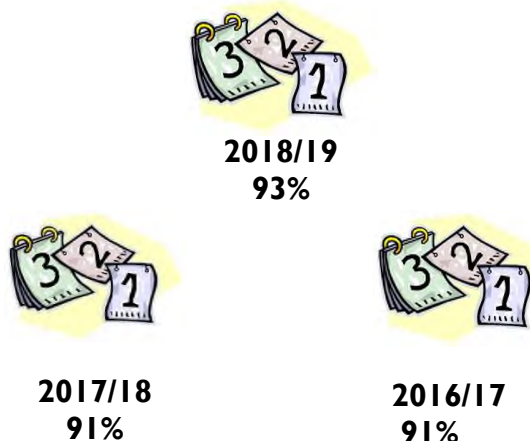
## Income Service

The Council receives income (e.g. grants, payments for service) of all types, and the Income Service processes this income, collecting the Council's debts in a timely and efficient manner in order to make the most of the income. As a service, we consider the needs of the Council's departments and act sensitively to debtors' financial circumstances when carrying out our work.

***We have identified the need to improve the recovery processes of some of the debts of the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, and we will collaborate with this Department in order to make the most of the indebted money that is collected and available to provide services.***



### % of invoices paid within 30 days



## Payments Service

We are responsible for paying the Council and GwE's creditors in an accurate and timely manner. We pay over 105,000 invoices annually, with 93% of the invoices being paid within 30 days on average, aiming to prioritise paying local suppliers promptly.

**We will be moving to an e-invoices system in order to improve the service's efficiency. These arrangements will reduce the delay when paying and will enable us to have control over all invoices that reach the Council.**

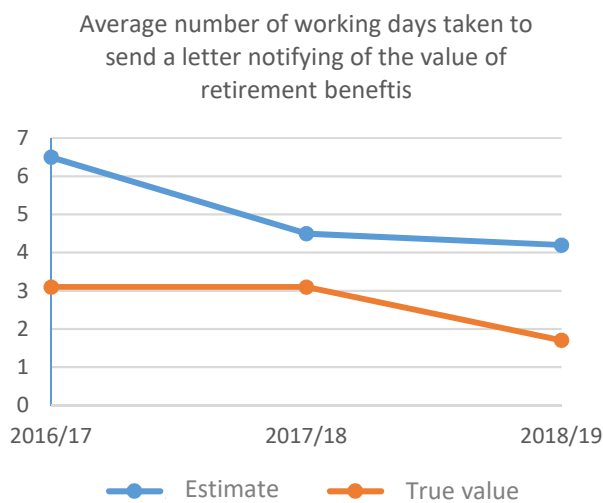
## Payroll Service

There are over 7,200 different individuals working for the Council in order to enable it to serve on behalf of the people of Gwynedd, and the purpose of the Payroll Service is to ensure that they get paid accurately and in a timely manner. The service also keeps appropriate accounts in order to pay external bodies such as HMRC.

## Pensions Service

The Pensions Service is responsible for administering the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) on behalf of over 40 employers including Gwynedd Council, Anglesey County Council and Conwy County Borough Council. The fund has over 18,000 active members, 12,000 deferred members and 10,000 pensioners. The service's daily duties include establishing a record for new members, making changes to members' records, calculating deferred benefits, transferring pension rights in and out of the LGPS, and paying benefits after the retirement and death of the scheme's members.

**In 2020/21, we will improve our self-service provision for members and will be working with our employers to ensure that we receive the salary/contribution details of members every month.**



## Investment and Treasury Management Service

Within this service, we invest the Council's money in order to gain interest to contribute towards funding services. We also manage the Pension Fund's investments in order to ensure the ability to

pay pensions now and in future. In addition to this, we are responsible for making decisions on long-term loans.

The Unit's aim is to keep money safe, gain interest and ensure that funding is available to pay for daily expenditure.

During 2018/19, the Council's borrowing activity remained within the constraints originally set. £307,000 was the total interest and dividends received on investments, which is higher than the £130,000 included in the budget. No banks the Council had used for investments had failed to pay.

***Local government pension funds in Wales work by pooling investments in order to get the greatest benefit of joint-investing.***

## **Finance and Accounting Service (including devolved units)**

We provide a finance and accounting service, and help and support services to be effective and efficient. The service:

- Regularly monitors and reports on the Council's financial performance.
- Provides financial support with a gross budget of over £418 million
- Is responsible for producing final accounts for the accounts of Gwynedd Council, two joint-committees, the Harbour and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board
- Assists the departments to realise over £52.2 million of savings and cuts since 2010/11, which is 93.6% of the savings target, with a slight slippage on the rest. The work of supporting the savings system is ongoing.



The Auditor General for Wales has published an unconditional audit report on the 2018/19 financial statements, namely that the accounts had been appropriately prepared and provide an accurate and fair picture of the financial situation.

***We will provide more financial advice to all of the Council's budget holders, as well as "business" advice to departments.***

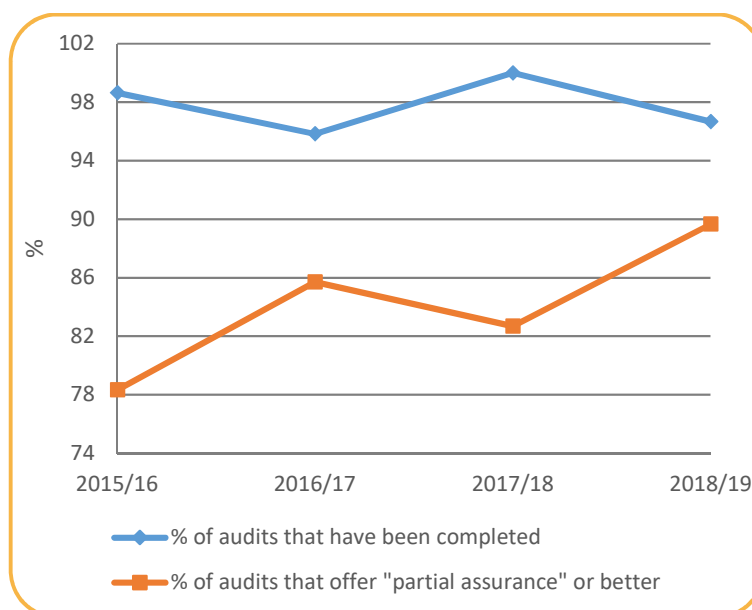
***The money the Council receives from Welsh Government is insufficient to pay for the key services provided by the Council. Therefore, in order to ensure a balanced budget, we will also continue to realise the savings that have already been approved, and will also ensure that we plan to identify and select the savings required in order to respond to the financial challenge facing the Council in the future.***

## Internal Audit Service

We review the Council's governance and administrative arrangements in order to give confidence to the authority and the citizen that these arrangements are robust. We report independently and objectively to the Head of Finance Department and the Audit and Governance Committee.

For 2018/19, a new system of placing Internal Audit reports in one of four general assurance categories was introduced. The initial feedback has been very positive.

A system of developing "agreed actions" was completed, namely a contract between us and managers across the Council on how to improve management and reduce risks.



## Risk and Insurance Service

All Council departments need to assess the threats and opportunities that could face them when providing their services, and prioritise their activities based on the assessment. The role of the Risk and Insurance Service is to advise and support the departments in doing so. We also protect the interests of ratepayers by ensuring appropriate insurance arrangements and dealing with around 250 claims per year.

***Work still needs to be done to ensure that all Council departments maintain the system of recording their main risks and are regularly reviewed. The Risk and Insurance Service will support all departments to ensure that the use made of the Corporate Risk Register is consistent across the Council, and that risks are updated continuously. In parallel, the procedure of considering the contents of risk registers when monitoring the performance of departments, will develop further.***

## Information Technology Service

**We implement the Information Technology Strategy in order to help the people of Gwynedd to gain easy access to the Council's information and services, and for staff to work efficiently.**

The face of the service is the Support Service and the Helpdesk, which supports 2,350 users and completes approximately 20,000 requests for information, including providing 450 new computers annually, and 1,780 mobile phones and tablet computers.

The Information Technology Strategy ensures that our technology services are presented on firm foundations that are supported by the *Infrastructure, Telephone and Network Service*, spreading to 250 buildings, 1,400 wireless access points and 2,700 phone connections, and support all systems in our data centres on 440 servers and over 1,000TB of storage. Serious problems were encountered in the data centre in July 2018 and a substantial work programme was put together to improve resilience and an investment was made in a new ventilation system to remove issues of damp in the main data centre in the Headquarters and introduce new servers and storage area in the main data centre and at the data centre in Penrhyndeudraeth. The two data centres are connected with a fast fibre connection and we will see further improvements introduced early in 2020 to strengthen the resilience of our system.

The Gwynedd Schools Digital Strategy has been prepared, with the technical work to be introduced now in progress and we will introduce a new Corporate Digital Strategy in 2020/21, thus transforming our services further.

The *Geographical Development and Information Service Unit* provides around 160 systems that have been developed around the user's bespoke needs, including systems that are used by the departments to serve the public, direct interfaces for the public and self-service for staff.

The *Programme Management and Innovation Unit* provides support to the departments to meet their IT needs, including ordering IT equipment and materials, implementing and monitoring contracts and analysing needs.

**During 2020/21, we will carry out other exercises to strengthen the resilience of our provision and the increasing demand to support services 24/7, introduce substantial improvements within our schools and put the new Digital Strategy into practice.**

% of network availability

2019/20: 99.98%



% Helpdesk service (satisfied or very satisfied)

2019/20: 99.35%

