



REGIONAL NEWS *(ISSUE 4)*

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Any contributions to this newsletter are welcomed and can be sent direct to northeast@cipfa.org

SECTION 1 - Welcome from the President



Dear members

Hope everyone is bearing up in the current situation and looking forward to, hopefully, a relaxation of the lockdown rules which will no doubt involve days out and trips to restaurants and pubs... remember them?

This newsletter touches on a number of these issues as well as what an Executive Committee member has been doing during lockdown.

This edition also provides a reminder that we have the Annual General Meeting later this month as well as a few Bite Size training sessions - see further details below.

The Secret Accountant has been busy again and this time we have another anonymous article, one of our members describe retirement during a pandemic.

This month brings to the end of my 2 years as NE President and it has flown over. Looking back to March 2019, it seems a lifetime ago and nobody could foresee the challenges ahead.

I now hand over the reins to the very safe hands of James Charlton who will do a fantastic job for the next 2 years.

It has been an absolute pleasure to be NE President and I am proud of the work carried out by the Executive Team in the most trying of times.

Each e-newsletter will also be posted on our website, Facebook page and Twitter.

Finally, we recently received the sad news of the death of Peter Smith. Whilst I didn't have the pleasure to meet Peter personally, I have spoken to CIPFA colleagues who worked with him, and they have spoken very highly of him. It came across loud and clear that as well as being an excellent accountant he was also a gentleman. An obituary can be read in section 8.

Jim Dafter
President

SECTION 2 - UPCOMING EVENTS



CIPFA in the North East - Events Update

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

24th March 2021 at 17:00

This will be a virtual event
More details to follow

We do hope you will join us for our quiz, which we are hosting after our AGM, this will be an opportunity to socially engage with colleagues and have some fun.

BITE SIZE SESSIONS

In addition we are offering a series of bite size sessions - Leading figures in Public Services will take us through their experiences of the Covid challenges faced across sectors such as Health, Local Authority's and Education, the Finance response and the role of Finance in building back stronger.

Please contact northeast@cipfa.org
for further information

SECTION 3 - CIPFA UPDATES

In case you have missed them [CIPFA](#) have published the following items recently, check them out there is some interesting stuff here:

- The latest on [Code of Practice](#), importantly now with additional guidance
- [Successful Collaborations in the Public Services: The Role of Internal Audit - coming this month](#)
- A practical guide to local Authority and Public sector [Asset Management](#)
- [Service Reporting Code of Practice](#)
- [Disclosure checklists](#)

And many more in the [CIPFA Thinks](#) and [CIPFA Speaks](#) part of the website.

For those that subscribe to the Technical Information Service ([TIS Online](#)) there has been a range of new releases, such as:

- [COVID - 19 Impact on Transport](#)
- [IFRS 16 Leases](#)
- [PWLB Consultation](#)

As well as lively discussions on the forum covering VAT, Fraud and long term budgeting.

.....and many more

SECTION 4 - THE LAST 6 MONTHS

None of us wanted to believe there was a second lockdown coming, but it did and the advice given from the government was to stay at home as much as possible. Once again our home was our office, after a short lifting of restrictions in the summer, we were back to groundhog day. Homeschooling, essential travel, household bubbles, working from home and the highlight of all our days was being allowed out to exercise (still with the people we live with). CIPFA in the North East still managed to hold another successful Inspiring Event, with a week full of captivating remote sessions, you can find a more detailed account below. In this section we also have a reflection on Retirement during a Pandemic, from one of our members and finally, Kevin Johnston has shared with us his dream office built (almost) by his own hands. This has been our new norm for the past year, here is hoping to the next edition of this section is slightly different..... Although I think we have all learnt what is truly important to all of us during this time, and it is safe to say life will never be the same again.

STAY AT HOME**PROTECT THE NHS****AND SAVE LIVES**

If you would like to share anything about your lockdown experience please send it to northeast@cipfa.org

We would love to see how you have all been spending your time.

LOCKDOWN FOR RETIREES

“Retire!” they said.

“Go do something new!” they said.

“You no longer need to money! they said. I wouldn’t have minded, but this was 20 years ago!

...and then you get to your late 50s, and you see those not much older than you are requiring more of the NHS and potentially having to limit those things you enjoyed, scrambling around the rocky hills, drinking into the small hours, etc. It brings it home that if you want to do something else, you better get a move on before you no longer have the physical capacity for it.

Travel, ever since I ran away from home at the age of 3 (to be picked up by the local GP after about 500 yards) I’ve wanted to travel. Travel, that’s what I wanted to do, and I better do it while I can still afford the insurance.

I’m lucky, I’ve never been made redundant or stayed on for ‘the deal’ but when you look at how much your pension is going to be reduced by ‘going early’ and start thinking I can survive on that it’s time to move on. Cue the deafening sound of your colleagues.

So the day of your 60th arrives, all your work colleagues know you’re going (and probably pleased to see the back of you), you have plans; for travel, to play the guitar, learn to paint, to walk miles, and learn to properly cook.

But it comes as a bit of a shock, people say nice things about you, you forget what you’ve done for the last 38 years and make some lame speech that annoys more then it entertains, and you get a load of presents that you don’t deserve as your retiring and they still have to work. And you walk out of the door. The shock of receiving a monthly pension that’s less than half what your salary used to be hits hard, but you’ve done the sums (your still an accountant) and you’ll more than manage.

The next day is not like a holiday or weekend, you still wake up at 6am because you haven’t got into the habit of not doing so and anyway you have too much to do. Places to go, people to meet, guitar to practice, photos to catalogue. The list is endless and you’re used to losing 60 hours a week with work so time is limited.

Except it's not, there's an additional 50 hours to fill. But here's the rub. Everything takes longer. Cutting the grass used to be a blast around after work and before it got too dark or that 20 minutes at the weekend between the weekly visit to the supermarket and getting out for the Saturday drinks. Now it's; properly untangle the cable, move the pots, ensure straight lines, edging, cleaning the mower, have a cup of tea to enjoy the finished result. I may return to this phenomenon in a later missive.

And then there's the holidays, long haul flights are no problem as you don't need to go to work so can recover the jet lag, kids aren't coming so school holidays aren't a problem, Thursday to 3 weeks on Tuesday doesn't require prior approval. It is a joyous time, what could possibly go wrong.

Towards the end of a trip to Sri Lanka, the guide was getting a little agitated about some virus that was in China. I wasn't too happy either, China was coming up in a couple of months. He was suggesting we would want to wear a mask and kept spraying the tour bus. We were English and all a certain age and didn't need this level of a protection from a flu bug.

Oh, how we learnt in the next month. After returning to Blighty and managing a couple of quick breaks into the UK, we were locked in. and then the pubs shut. And we could only walk out for an hour. Then we couldn't meet anyone. Then we could meet some but not all. Then the pubs opened, but not the same. Then they shut again. And the footy was cancelled. All travel was effectively stopped. No China, South Africa, New Zealand, Mexico, Uzbekistan, Majorca, even the rest of England was off more than on and kiss goodbye to all the visits to Scotland.

So what do you do? Thank your lucky stars, that's what. You've a garden, not big but still takes an hour plus to cut the grass. No kids to home school, no working from home and the stress that brings. You can still get out through the week when everyone else is working, you're still fit enough to not need the NHS (apart from the dentist), and your income is not affected. You have nothing to complain about. But that's never stopped you in the past and it'll not stop you now.

It can get a bit tedious though, and then someone you used to know rings you up and asks if you know anyone who could do a little job for them and pride kicks in and it's only 20 days and you'd be doing them a favour and before you know it your back in it and loving it, and you've no longer time to cut the grass or go to the supermarket and the 20 days has been extended, I couldn't have been that bad. And it's all go. And we'll get the vaccine, and the holidays are all pushed back a year or two so the things we were going to see will still be there if we're fit enough to still climber up temples and fight through crowds.

Happy days.

Next week, its public sector reorganisation and the never-ending circle, or Management theories, same message, different badge, or the fright of not having a job.

Lucky Boy

Inspire sessions

In December we held a series of one hour online seminars on a variety of topics, all with the aim of inspiring during these difficult times. All our speakers had previously spoken at the Inspiring Women event held in January 2020, and it was great to see them again reviewing how the pandemic had affected them and their organisations. Whilst hosting an online seminar isn't as easy to run as you'd think, it does make attending easier for members. We'd like to run more of these in the future and would welcome any feedback or suggestions members have for future sessions.

Lockdown Project (By Kevin Johnston)

Sure I'm not alone at the moment being cooped up in the house using the Kitchen table, the sofa or a spare bedroom as a makeshift office.

Coupled with no space in my house to accommodate a more comfortable working environment and the likelihood of regular home working after things return to 'normal', I decided to invest in an outside office. Although the house is very small, there's lots of space out the back which could be better utilised.

And so the dream was born - the first picture shows the outside of the office building; the half closest to the camera is the office, and the other half a storage shed. In advance of building work starting I spent 3 weekends clearing lots of 'stuff' I'd accumulated over recent years from the area this now sits, including relocating a shed. I never fail to shock myself with the amount of seemingly essential 'stuff' I keep but really don't need!

Now whilst I would like to say I used my extensive DIY skills I have to confess I only project managed the work. It took a team of Joiners, plasterers and electricians 8 days to complete the build, a feat in itself given the horrendous weather conditions they worked through.

The second picture shows the inside, which I have painted and kitted out including an all-important heater for this time of year. Once the blinds are fitted I can add all the IT paraphernalia (screens, cables, etc) and it should be looking like the Starship Enterprise in no time.



The last photo is the view from the office looking picturesque in the snow. Although not visible, the bottom end of the Cheviots can just be made out on a clear day over these hills. If I was to pan West (left on the photo), the Simonside hills are visible. Certainly beats the view from Floor 5 of the Civic Centre; though I have to admit the views from Floor 10 across the city skyline are quite spectacular!

SECTION 5 - STUDENTS

We're looking for volunteers to join the CIPFA North East Committee to represent the students' voice in the region and develop a student network. There is also an opportunity to join the national CIPFA Student Network as a representative for the North East. It's a great way to meet other CIPFA students, gain new skills and looks great on your CV! If you're interested please get in touch with us at northeast@cipfa.org

<https://www.cipfa.org/members/regions/north-east/students>

We would like to encourage students to feedback any topics they would like covered in this section. Please get in touch at northeast@cipfa.org

SECTION 6 - MENTORING

Mentoring is a great way of sharing experience, knowledge and advice and there are benefits for both mentor and mentee. Mentoring is beneficial for all stages in your career, and even reverse mentoring where a more junior employee mentors a more senior person can work really well.

At CIPFA NE we'd like to try and pilot a mentoring matching service. If you'd be interested in either becoming a mentor or a mentee please get in touch. We'll provide more details on how mentoring could work, and match you up with another member.

Please email northeast@cipfa.org if you're interested.

SECTION 7- SECRET ACCOUNTANT

An alternative perspective on the benefits of CIPFA membership



Secret Accountant - A Change of Perspective

Our boiler gave up a few weeks before Christmas. It started innocently enough with the occasional jet of cold water interrupting my usual steamy shower. However the balance changed to the extent it became almost continuously cold with the odd warm drizzle just to provide a little false hope.

The engineer checked it, and duly pronounced it beyond repair, it was 14 years old - so we selected a new one and waited for its installation, in 10 days' time.



If the story was to proceed... "and we waited and waited" similar to some "That's Life" story under Esther Rantzen's stewardship (there's one to puzzle the Trainee Accountants!) it may have sounded a far more interesting tale. But in truth the firm turned up on time and did an excellent job completing the installation to our satisfaction within one day.

This reflection is in fact about the changing relation with the old boiler in those remaining few days - an accountant's still got to shower, even when home working !! Instead of the disappointment and cursing, I re-evaluate my morning routine, and came to enjoy those rare blissful moments when it chose to run warm-ish, rather than constant chilling downpour.

What can we learn from that broken boiler? Maybe we need to consider a change in the way we look at life as a result of Covid. Much has already been said about negative impact on our collective mental health and wellbeing, and its devastating impact will be felt for years to come. However, perhaps this is time to take stock, and ensure we take a moment to revel in those little successes in life - whether it's a few socially distanced words with a neighbour, or even yes that glass of wine or beer at the end of the week.

All these things have been largely denied to us for so long, let's make sure we cherish them as they return, step by step over the next few months ! A fresh perspective is called for, to ensure we celebrate life's triumphs, big and small.

Never could I have believed my disappointment at the closing of the gym - even though I was a reluctant attendee at the best of times., but I genuinely look forward to April and recommencing the unequal struggle with the rowing machine and exercise bike (why are they called spinning classes by the way - not a bobbin or thread in sight !)

Lessons of course must be learned - such as with the much vaunted app - I have just looked at mine for the first time in months to be reassured it remains "active and scanning", but appears to have no way of recording my vaccination.

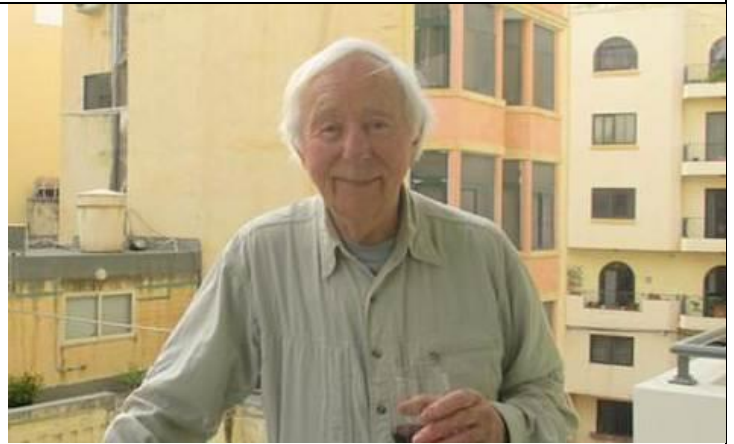
The vaccination programme itself however appears to be a massive medical and logistical success and I eagerly await my date - How imminently? It is impolite to ask an accountant, especially a secret one, their age !

While the political parties do seem to be in agreement about the effectiveness of the vaccination programme, personally I will instead rely on the honest opinion of my mum. She was suitably impressed and having escorted her to the door she was in and out in less time than it took me to buy her a paper from the newsagent opposite. This did constitute an "essential" purchase by the way, how else would she know what was on telly for the week!

I am not sure that Rishi Sunak's next big campaign will be "Drink out to help out" but there is no doubt our hospitality sector has been heavily hit, so I for one undertake to do my bit to refloat this particularly important bit of the economy. It won't of course be quite the same - with anticipated initially opening being potentially outside and only within your own support bubble ! It's a bit like premiership football without the crowds - not nearly as good but eminently preferable to none whatsoever !

So let's all raise a glass (whatever your tippie) to the future. As Fred Astaire may have said "there may be trouble ahead" but let's face the music and dance - even if initially, that's in a socially distanced manner !

SECTION 8 - OBITUARY PETER SMITH

Obituary: Peter Smith

It is with deep sadness that we report the death of Peter Smith, late last year. Peter was born in Huddersfield, where he began his training at age 16 in 1953.

In 1959 he moved to Bradford, and then to Chester in 1962 when he became assistant chief accountant at Chester City Council, at which time he gained his CIPFA qualification.

Roles followed at Keighley Municipal Borough Council and Gloucester County Borough Council, before Peter took a job in 1969 as deputy borough treasurer at Gateshead County Borough Council.

Peter had expected to spend just two years in the North East, but instead moved to Tyne and Wear County Council in 1973 as assistant county treasurer. During his career at Tyne and Wear he progressed to the positions of deputy county treasurer in 1974 and county treasurer in 1980, at which point he was treasurer of the Northumbria Police Authority, Northumbria Probation and After Care Service and Newcastle Airport.

Peter was responsible for obtaining full funding for Tyne and Wear Metro, and one of his last tasks there was to negotiate the purchase of land for the Nisan factory.

His time there lasted 13 years until the council was abolished, after which he spent two years as general manager of the residual body overseeing the windup of the county council and ensuring all staff secured jobs elsewhere.

In 1991, Peter became one of the first NHS chairs in the country, for Gateshead Community Health Trust, after which he also worked for the Gateshead Healthcare Trust and then spent 14 years as chair of the Queen Elizabeth Foundation Hospital Trust, until 2012.

“He worked wholeheartedly for the people of the North East, which had become his adopted home,” said his wife Judith. Our thoughts are with all of Peter’s family.

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