

Mr S Hearse
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Date: 12 June 2023

SUPPLEMENT

9.	QBR 4 22-23 Q&A Responses (Pages 2 - 6)
	Meeting Organiser: Kirsty Brown Dem Services 01237 428768
	Centre for Public Scrutiny – website http://www.cfps.org.uk/

Budget Narrative – Agenda Page 13

Question from Mr Harper

Note surplus of £833K will this be returned to reserves?

David Heyes, Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer

Yes, report will go to C&R for approval

Budget monitoring, Community – Agenda Page 15

Question from Mr Harper

Barton House included, is Sully House and units to be shown?

David Heyes, Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer

Scully House hasn't open as at close of Financial year.

Theme 1

Local Economy - Agenda Pages 17- 20

Question from Mr Harper

Appledore Clean Maritime - Encouraging that interest is being shown, could an indication be given to the actual levels of enquiries.

Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer

We are working with JLL as a commercial agent. They have already begun to position the centre within their own networks and business contacts. We have also had a range of other direct contacts from businesses, totalling approximately 20, although they range in interest levels and scale of opportunity. Given the timescales involved as well before expected opening this pipeline will be ramped up by JLL over the time period.

Question from Mr Harper

Support to Business and Local Economy - Whilst behind target but with actions in place, could these actions be given

Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer

Since the last update we have further developed;

- Town centre beautification grant launched
- Shared Prosperity Fund business support scheme (with ND+) now expected to launch in mid July, post completion of the existing Thrive scheme
- Rural Prosperity Fund business grant scheme (with ND+) now expected to launch in mid July
- Bideford Regeneration Strategy released and sub-groups developed for a range of fields, including Tourism, Culture and Heritage on 21st June. Town centre promotion work is also underway through Discover Bideford to raise the profile of the town and its businesses.

- Nature Tourism support in place through the Biosphere.
- Tourism specific business support to be rolled out in autumn through ND+ after the busiest season for those businesses

Question from Mr Harper

Economic Development - Torridge has 32% child poverty, the measure by % of mean earnings, what is being done to address this, ASHE has been poor for years.

Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer

The best way to get all people out of poverty is to create higher earning employment for all. However, that is also a longer-term piece of work, which we are on track to achieve, with aspiration having been front and centre in our work and will be tracked as part of the evaluation of the Appledore Clean Maritime Innovation Centre. Nonetheless, through the Northern Devon Futures board we collaborate with the Children and Young People group who have a specific focus on this thread.

Theme 2 Communities, Health and Housing – Agenda Pages 21 - 26

Question from Mr Harper

LE 546 (E2E for processing Disabled facility Grants) – Could explanation be given as to why there is no information for this year.

Staci Dorey, Head of Legal & Governance

The team are currently working alongside Foundations in respect of simplifying the current policy and streamlining our processes for a more efficient customer service. This has involved working alongside the team, and other agencies to support this work. The team have been focused on this which we hope will simplify and speed up the process for applications. The current system doesn't easily lend itself to easily pulling reports. This is another thing that Foundations are assisting the team with, and ICT have arranged for the software provider to visit TDC in July to help with this work. Further reports will come to Council later on in the year. Generally speaking, the end to end time varies greatly depending upon whether the works are something like a stairlift/walk in shower, or major adaptations that are needed to a person's home. Major works can, understandably take longer bearing in mind the tendering and contracting process. Stairlifts (and other minor adaptations) can be completed relatively quickly.

Question from Mr Harper

N – 156 (Temporary Accommodation) This is an identified issue, numbers high, could a rough estimate be given for 23-24

Staci Dorey, Head of Legal & Governance

Unfortunately not. We have no way of identifying presentations that may come through the door, although the team do a lot of preventive work and intervene at an early stage. This often includes discussions with agents and landlords as soon as we become aware to maintain the tenant's accommodation. We work with customers as soon as they become threatened with homelessness in a prevention role. The difficulty is the lack of affordable accommodation to move people to. LHA rates haven't increased for a substantial period whereas we have seen rents increasing.

Question from Mr Harper

N 155 Affordable housing well below target, how many will be built 23-24

Helen Smith, Planning Manager

From our monitoring data we can only give an indication of how many affordable dwellings have commenced. The Council's Housing Enabler post is currently vacant, and this is the sort of information that this postholder would secure from discussions directly with Registered Providers. Until such time as an Enabler is in place, we can engage with the key affordable housing providers to understand their pipeline of supply as they should have a reasonable indication of their delivery for the current financial year. We will be able to report on this information in the next update.

Theme 4 Our Council – Agenda Page 33

Question from Mr Harper

BV 012 Numbers of long term sickness have nearly doubled from last year, is this related to the current market place issues.

Sarah Ayres, HR & Communications Manager

Apologies there was an error in the calculations with the figures provided in the commentary. There has been a decrease in the number of long term sickness absences, decreasing from 30 in 2021/22 to a total of 23 for 2022/23, accounting for 4.6% of all absences. In order to support staff who are on long term sick, we introduced an Employee Assistance Programme in September 2022, which offers employees fast access to counselling and a number support guides to help them. We actively manage all sickness cases and use an occupational health provider to give us advice of how to manage individuals health conditions in the workplace.

End of Year Trend Summary – Agenda Pages 37 - 47

Question from Mr Dengate

Complaints - LE260: An increasing trend upwards on complaint processing time for second year. Is this due to the nature of complaints becoming more complicated or resources to handle them?

Sarah Ayres, HR & Communications Manager

We had several very complex cases to deal with last year, which took longer than the agreed deadline of 28 days to conclude. There are occasions where a thorough investigation is preferential to a quicker response, especially in cases that might later be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The delays were in most cases not significant but because case numbers are relatively low just one or two can significantly skew the average.

Recent staff movements within teams or people leaving the council has meant that some experience in complaint case management has been lost and complaints have therefore been channelled to a smaller core of officers, with at times some inevitable overloading. We have recognised this and arranged for further LGO "effective complaint handling" training in September with around 15 delegates attending, including new officers to Torridge. This will hopefully expand the pool of complaint handlers to more optimised levels and lead to better response times going forward.

Question from Mr Dengate

Human Resources - BV012: Sickness trends seem to be increasing which must be impacting overall. With an overall FTE of 235 (LE600b) a total of 56 on long term sick for 2022/23 must be a concern?

Sarah Ayres, HR & Communications Manager

Apologies there was an error in the calculations with the figures provided in the commentary. There has been a decrease in the number of long term sickness absences, decreasing from 30 in 2021/22 to a total of 23 for 2022/23, accounting for 4.6% of all absences. In order to support staff who are on long term sick, we introduced an Employee Assistance Programme in September 2022, which offers employees fast access to counselling and a number support guides to help them. We actively manage all sickness cases and use an occupational health provider to give us advice of how to manage individuals health conditions in the workplace.

Question from Mr Dengate

Housing - N156 (Temp Accom): Indicators suggest that rental market options will continue to decrease with a likely increase in cost for attainable rental properties. This has become our largest statutory overspend. How long can TDC manage this significant cost before it impacts on our overall financial resilience?

Staci Dorey, Head of Legal & Governance

We recognise the impact that this is having on our budget, and the fact that we need to reduce the spend as soon as possible, however many factors are outside TDC's control. Unfortunately, this is not a problem that TDC can solve alone. We currently have a Housing Project Team with further reports coming forward to Full Council, however there does need to be a recognition that many factors are outside our control and we are in a very similar situation to other Devon Districts (and authorities further afield).

Question from Mr Dengate

Legal services - LE262: Freedom of Information requests: Recognising the increasing numbers are possibly contributing to the trend down are more resources required to assist on meeting the target or are our limitations within acceptable levels?

Staci Dorey, Head of Legal & Governance

At this stage there is no indication that this is needed, but the manager will keep this under review

Question from Mr Dengate

Property – Climate change - In view of the efforts in reducing emissions from TDC operations is there a specific factor causing the upward trend or is it due to increased operations?

Donna Sibley, Joint Climate Change Officer

The Council's carbon footprint has shown a slight increase from the 2020/2021 baseline from 3875.1 tCO₂e to 4267.0 tCO₂e. This is an increase of 10%. The main reasons for this are:

- greater expenditure on goods which, due to the spend method used to calculate scope 3 emissions, inflates the carbon footprint.
- An increase in the carbon footprint for our operational services.

The baseline year of 2020/21 was impacted due to covid lockdowns, so we always thought the carbon footprint would go up slightly. The increase in the footprint for operational services was because we were driving more.

Question from Mr Dengate

Recycling - Garden waste has been trending down since over the last few years. Is there a correlation to our increasing charges on this or have collections remained equivalent?

Richard Haste, Operational Services Manager

Introducing a chargeable service has seen tonnages reduce since implementation in 2018. The cost-of-living increase may have also contributed to the slight decline, in addition to the weather which also plays its part on the amount we collect. Last year's six-week dry spell saw tonnages drop considerably.

The authority estimates a 30% take up of the service which is on par with other authorities across the country. We are still achieving this rate.

Tonnages and bin numbers to date:

Tonnage

Year 2020 – 21:	4981.040t
Year 2021-22:	4610.150t
Year 2022-23:	4086.340t

Bins

Year	April	May	June	Total
2023	4,692	5,226	964	10,882
2022	5,213	4,762	864	10,839
2021	5,843	4,257	1,288	11,388

(June is to the 14th of the month)