

QBR 4 - Responses

Agenda Item 9

QBR Q4 / March 2019 – Q&A

Income Monitoring – Agenda Page 15

- 1) **Ian Harper** Note that **Development Management** is down by £157,345 against last year and down against budget

Sean Kearney - The comment in the report is relevant. We await some of the larger reserved matters applications that bring large fees and, without doubt Brexit uncertainty has slowed development progress as house builders and homeowners consider their finances.

- 2) **Ian Harper - Harbour** – Income £55k down against last year, however, the income and expenditure statement at 31st March 2019 shows the following - Harbour a loss of £114, 591 including Pilotage then this rises to a loss of £170,208, for the financial year.

Sean Kearney - The figures in the QBR come from the Harbour Board report which was based on an estimated forecast as the recharges were not available at that time.

The recharges are now available and final outturn figures are:

Harbour Forecast	Harbour Outturn	Pilotage Forecast	Pilotage Outturn	Total Forecast	Total Outturn
£114,951	£111,008	£55,257	£41,310	£170,208	£152,318

QBR4 2017 in answer to a question I raised, it was stated that ‘Paul Labistour has been tasked with looking at options and will report to Harbour Board in due course,’ has this happened?

Sean Kearney - The Harbour Master (HM) has been contacting shipping agents and aggregates companies in an attempt to stimulate business. We have offered discounted arrangements to companies to attract shipping activity to no avail. Feedback suggests that the size of ship that Bideford can accommodate limits the attractiveness of the port. The HM has also been in contact with other Ports to learn how they are attracting business and also developing their leisure offer as per the strategy mentioned below.

The Estuary and Harbour Strategy was published in August 2014 is this to be updated?

Sean Kearney - There are no plans to update the document at present.

3) Salaries Monitoring – Agenda Page 15

Ian Harper – Note there is an overspend by Waste and Recycling and Planning of £214K, however, in other services there is an underspend of £22K against budget. If other departments are short of staff is this an explanation as to the rise in the sickness, average days, per employee rising from 6.8 last year to 10.8 this year.

HR Response - There is no demonstrable correlation between vacancies and sickness rates traditionally Refuse and Recycling have the highest sickness rates; within Refuse and Recycling sickness is covered by agency staff. Given the relatively low numbers of staff employed at Torridge a few long term sickness cases can have a measurable impact on the overall sickness rate

4) Budget Monitoring – Agenda Page 16

Ian Harper Note that Strategic Manager is £459,866 worse than budget.

It should be noted that the overspend here of £460k INCLUDES the transfer of the £364k surplus to reserves.....ignoring the transfer of the £364k surplus revenue budgets within the Strategic Manager area are overspent by £96k (£460k -£364k). The Strategic Manager Resources area includes the £242k overspend on Housing Benefit Subsidy arising from increased Homelessness expenditure.

Burton - Is the annual contribution to the Burton shown, and if so where, after all this represents £174,249, I note in their accounts 2017-18 they made a surplus of over £20K and hold funds of £96K.

The annual contribution to the Burton for the management of the Museum is as stated £174k, this expenditure is included within the Strategic Manager (Services) area.

5) Investments – Agenda Page 17

Ian Harper - Investments - This has been discussed regularly our return is 0.85% - is this in line with other LA's?

Some other local authorities may obtain greater return on their investments as their treasury management policies allow them to invest in areas such as property management funds (with higher risk). Torridge's treasury management policy agreed annually by Full Council restricts the Council's temporary investments to UK Registered Financial Institutions with a Fitch 1 rating. Torridge's Treasury Management policy (with reference to CIPFA Prudential Code) states that the priority of the Council's Treasury Management Policy is firstly security of its investment followed by liquidity (ensuring the Council has sufficient cash flow to undertake its day to day functions); the last priority is the consideration of the return generated.

6) Goal 1 – Developing a Prosperous & Sustainable Economy - Agenda Page 18

Ian Harper TDC1 - Note that Cleave Wood is not generating much interest, is this also true for employment build.

Sean Kearney - It seems that the size of the site is an issue for house builders in these uncertain times. It also seems that a construction skills shortage in the County means that house builders are not able to service sites simultaneously so are concentrating on high value areas. Demand for employment space remains high (anecdotally) thus we are reconsidering options for part of the site.

Ian Harper TDC2 - What has been the result of being the first Authorities to develop a digital strategy has it resulted in further investment and skills?

Sean Kearney - The Strategy was only adopted earlier this year but since then we have been able to take the lead on the Local Full Fibre Network project, the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Programme, the North Devon Digital Biosphere project and Digital Twin project that is in conception. We are also now able to justify active support for community fibre partnerships using gigabit vouchers.

Invest in Northern Devon - has the action plan been developed and implemented?

Sean Kearney - As previously mentioned the development of the Northern Devon Economic Strategy is scheduled to begin this Autumn and inward investment will be considered as part of that. It did not seem sensible to progress a strategy for the area in advance of the publication of the Heart of the South West LEP Local Industrial Strategy, currently being drafted, and before the aspirations of the new Council have been determined.

7) Goal 2 Stronger, Safer, Healthier Communities – Agenda Page 20

Ian Harper - TDC 5 – Empty Properties Work Plan - When is hoped that Housing Renewal team will be able to start work on this project, and has the working party been convened?

The whole function probably requires a review, especially following recent Council Tax changes and opportunities in that area. The Policy also requires updating. No dedicated resources are available in the Housing Renewal Team – if this remains a corporate priority, resources will need to be identified and a project plan developed.

8) Goal 2 – Agenda Page 22 Councillor Hames

Performance Indicator NI156 - What plans are there to deal with the 22 percent increase in temporary accommodation? Is it envisaged that the new hostel building funded by Torrridge will take up the slack? Are there also plans to set up a development company, as other councils have done?

Yes it is envisaged that this will in part help to alleviate the growing problem. In addition to this other options are being investigated such as other property acquisitions and the use of modular accommodation, although this option does have the added problem of locating suitable site(s).

The Council does not have any plans at present to set up a development company. There are significant costs associated with going down that route and we have other powers available to us such as property acquisitions to alleviate the temporary accommodation problem.

9) Goal 2 – Agenda Page 23 Ian Harper

LE160 and LE163 – Attendance at Leisure Centres - Is the decline in part due to the operator of these facilities?

Sean Kearney - Of course, as the operator manages the facilities their performance will have an impact on the use of those facilities. It is possible that some of the concerns about poor maintenance, cleanliness and customer service that have been communicated to us might have affected numbers. We have sought assurance from the operator that these issues have/will be remedied and a presentation to External Overview and Scrutiny was made. There were also significant periods of closure for maintenance reasons that were not the fault of the contractor but will have reduced accessibility to the facilities.

Planning - We were given figures last QBR which showed the gulf between new builds in North Devon and Torridge areas, is North Devon experiencing a decline in sales of new homes?

Sean Kearney - The housing market has definitely slowed but not only in this area.

10) Goal 3 – Protecting and Enhancing our Quality Environment - Agenda Page 25

Councillor Hames - Action W1.C - I see the in-vessel composting unit is no longer in use. Does composting still take place?

Richard Haste - Yes it is still used for the open windrow composting of TDC and NDDC's garden waste. Now that we no longer collect food waste with organic waste there is no requirement for the material to be treated to comply with the animal by-products act. The building is used to process our dry recycling material.

What plans are there to reduce further residual waste in order to reduce amount sent to Energy from Waste?

Richard Haste - Reduce the amount of trade waste being collected via the domestic service, part of the Don't let Devon go to waste campaign, will be holding a series of roadshow to promote waste reduction/ recycling.

Part of the Governments waste review consultation, one suggestion was that all residents should have a free garden waste collection. This would reduce the amount

of waste sent to the EFW but would cost Torridge in excess of £600k per annum (without implementation costs) if adopted. But this would then be an unequitable service with those that do not have gardens paying for those that do. This would also have a direct impact on home composting.

Is there a scheme available to encourage farmers to recycle plastic used in agriculture? (I was alarmed to learn that farmers are burying it on their land.)

Richard Haste - Farmers are required to dispose of their waste appropriately and the majority do if they are farm assured. There are a number of schemes to support the agricultural industry, Cllr Hicks was involved at one point with a company called Farm XS, and there are a number of local collectors in the North Devon area.

11) Goal 4 – Agenda Page 31 Ian Harper

Property and Procurement - Accessing External funding with Econ Dev
Item 5 - are there many opportunities and are we accessing them?

Yes – we have two potential funding sources that we are currently pursuing with the Econ Dev team. We would add that we are always looking for opportunities and the reorganisation of the Planning and Economy Team has created capacity to develop project concepts to a stage that makes them more attractive to funders. Looking forward the working relationship between the property team and Economic Development will be strengthened further by the addition of an Estates Manager.