

Q&A Responses

Agenda Item 8

QBR – 20/21 – Q2 / September 2020 – Advance Q&A

Highlights – Agenda Pages 18 – 19

Page 19 Highlights – Budget monitoring

Recognising the current projected under funding in the capital program for 2021/2022 is there a way the QBR can incorporate a rolling one-year forward projection (i.e. 2021/2022) in addition to the current budget year we are in (currently 2020/2021). The purpose of this would be to provide both trend and impact forecasting in areas such as Capital and Reserves, Earmarked reserves, and Investments. This would be to help give more the 'big picture' to the forward travel of the Council's finances alongside the current income and expenditure. **Steve Dengate**

Verbal Update to be provided at meeting

Income – Agenda Page 20

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Car parking income. **Cllr Shirley Langford**

1. Are TDC likely to make car parking free as was the case in the first lockdown?
2. Has it been considered that there is now little benefit to shoppers or town centres of the 'buy one get one free' parking offer? Might this be moved to another month once lockdown is over? I appreciate it would be complicated to do and may need another Notice of Motion but just a query?

Sean Kearney – Head of Communities & Place

1. There is no intention to change any of the parking arrangements through the period of lockdown as this would require committee approval, but we will ask CEOs to be sensible about enforcement, not being unnecessarily punitive.
2. The decision on the buy one get one free period was for a specifically defined period October and November therefore there is no provision within that decision to change and or extend. From the information available there does not appear to have been any positive increase in footfall for the time it was in operation.

Capital & Revenue – Agenda Pages 21- 22

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Please comment on Budget overspends:

Strategic Manager (Services) £1.2 M over budget

Legal Fees £100K over budget

Ian Harper

David Heyes – Finance Manager

Strategic Manager (Services) £1.2 M over budget - This includes:

Contribution to Capital £642 (if approved),

Torrington Pool Roof Repairs £65k,

Shortfall on Car Park income £517k,

£181k for the additional costs of leisure services.

Offsetting the above are significant underspends such as

Additional Cost share income £73k,

Transport savings £80k

additional Green Waste income - £33k

Legal Fees £100K over budget

This is the budget set aside for the Knapp House

Page 22 Investments

Is it possible to have the breakdown of current investment holdings either as part of the QBR report or item 9 Review of Treasury Investment Options? Can we look to have an update on the average duration of the investment period funds are held and what element of these investments are not earmarked. **Steve Dengate**

Verbal update to be provided at meeting

Goal 1 – Prosperous & Sustainable Economy – Agenda Pages 23 - 25

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TDC 2 – Inward Investment / Investment in Growth – Action ER4 – **Ian Harper**

1. Note that the Enterprise Centre, Barnstaple has risen from the ground, whilst this is being driven by DCC what input has Torridge and what is our commitment to the future?
2. If this is a spin off from Petrocs Centre for Technology and Innovation Excellence, will that be looking to promote and develop companies meeting the challenges of the 21st century including AI, note report from Microsoft, August, that UK is poor compared to other Countries and that it will slow our recovery from the Covid-19?
3. The Economic Strategy has been paused, though contributions have been made to Devon Recovery Plan, what is happening to the recovery plan for Torridge post Covid-19?

Sean Kearney – Head of Communities & Place

1&2. The Enterprise Centre at Roundswell, whilst physically delivered by DCC, is a result of the hard work of the Northern Devon Innovation Board. Torridge is represented on and an active partner of the Board and the facility is for the benefit of Northern Devon. We have, though, not contributed financially to the delivery of the centre.

The Centre of Innovation, Technology and Enterprise is another project that was driven by the Board but delivered at and by Petroc. It forms part of the innovation network and eco system that we are working to provide in Northern Devon. The intention is that through innovation we can address problems like the one mentioned.

3. Town centre recovery plans for Bideford, Great Torrington and Holsworthy are currently in draft phase and being considered by Town Councils and key stakeholders. However, it is perceived that now is not the time, following the announcement of the second lockdown, to open for general consultation, especially as there is a noticeable drop in response rates for surveys over the last few weeks.
 - The current intention is to make updates based on key stakeholder responses and then make this available on our website without a fanfare, welcoming opinions but making it clear more dedicated consultations will take place in January. Then in January there will be a high-profile campaign but knowing at that point what is happening with Isaac's Yard, work hubs and The Globe.
 - Wider Northern Devon Recovery Group has made strong progress to evaluate current key projects from across local authorities, Biosphere Reserve, Petroc and One Northern Devon to allow a shared focus on recovery, although that has not been progressed into a publishable action plan, more a series of project strands to develop to shovel-ready stage.

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TDC3 - Harbour Review – Action H1C – Ian Harper

1. Harbour –Treating as a cost centre, first quarter showed a deficit of £13,841 what is the current position at end of Q2?
2. Fish Dock once again as a cost centre a deficit of £23,860.18 at Q1 was recorded, what is the current position at the end of Q2?
3. Re Fish Dock - are all the facilities being occupied or utilised on this site?

David Heyes – Finance Manager

1. Harbour - The first quarter was skewed by the one-off Deo Gloria (Sand dredger) campaign which brought in income on pilotage alone of £13k but this was absorbed by lack of activity and we are currently forecasting an income deficit for the year of £27k
2. Fish Dock Update for Q2 is as below: (Deficit is £55,631 for Q2 YTD vs £23,860 at Q1 including recharges and depreciation)

Excluding Recharges and Depreciation:

	2019-20	2020-21 Q2		Q1	Q2
Salaries	11,571.60	6,810.39		2,607.15	4,203.24
Expenses	77,296.19	49,132.75	includes NNDR for year @ £12K	20,315.72	28,817.03
Income	- 81,093.82	-37,197.00		- 17,505.44	- 19,691.56
	<u>7,773.97</u>	<u>18,746.14</u>		<u>5,417.43</u>	<u>13,328.71</u>

Including Recharges and Depreciation:

	2019-20	2020-21 Q2		Q1	Q2
Salaries	11,571.60	6,810.39		2,607.15	4,203.24
Expenses	77,296.19	49,132.75	includes NNDR for year @ £12K	20,315.72	28,817.03
Depn	29,077.79	14,509.50		7,254.75	7,254.75
Impairment/Revaluation	- 11,242.89	-		-	-
Insurance	1,380.00	1,471.50		735.75	735.75
Central Support	26,702.23	20,904.50		10,452.25	10,452.25
Income	- 81,093.82	-37,197.00		- 17,505.44	- 19,691.56
	<u>53,691.10</u>	<u>55,631.64</u>		<u>23,860.18</u>	<u>31,771.46</u>

3. Fish dock
 - Yes, site is fully occupied and operational.
 - We are currently working with the tenants to improve the conditions on site and plan for future maintenance and equipment requirements.
 - The recently vacant space in the office building at the front of the site is being considered by an adjoining occupier for a medium-term use.

Goal 2 – Stronger, Safer, Healthier Communities – Agenda Pages 26 - 30

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Measure LE546 End to End time for processing Disabled Facility Grants

Why are cases dealt with by South Hams not represented here? I thought they had been discussed in previous QBRs. – **Cllr Shirley Langford**

Janet Williams – Public Health & Housing Manager

Cases dealt with by South Hams on our behalf have never been regularly represented in the QBR's but were extracted as a one-off report requested by Councillors. While TDC monitors quality and timeliness of applications being processed externally, we have limited influence over this external process. It is also our intention to bring this service back 'in house' as soon as we are able.

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Measure NI156 - Average Number of households living in temporary accommodation

Notes, with current ban on evictions, once Covid-19 is over, is there any indication as to the level of evictions that might occur? – **Ian Harper**

Helen Page – Housing Options Team Leader

The total ban on evictions was lifted as we came out of the first lockdown and court hearings have been going ahead in recent weeks (with some delay), with action still possible on notices served before 29 August. That said, very few households have approached due to the loss of a tenancy.

Since 29 August s.21 'no fault' notices have had to give 6 months' notice and most s.8 notices also have to give 6 months' notice. There are some exceptions where little or no notice can be given, such as where there are rent arrears of more than 6 months and where there is antisocial behaviour. We are waiting for government guidance on how the national restrictions that apply from 5 November will impact on the legal process, but it is thought that bailiffs will not enforce evictions during lockdown. The government has already said that there will be a pause on evictions between 11 December and 11 January 2021.

Landlords have been serving 6-month notices and some households have sought assistance because they are under 6 months' notice, but this number is not particularly high at present. Some landlords wishing to serve notice may be delaying in the hope that notice periods reduce again in April 2021 and it is possible that some households who are under notice have delayed seeking help because of the extended notice period. Evictions will increase post Covid-19, but the level is difficult to predict as it will depend as much on the circumstances of landlords as tenants. It is noticeable that some landlords have sought possession because they have wanted to take advantage of a buoyant sales market. It is also noticeable that social landlords are delaying action.

So far, the number of households seeking assistance during the pandemic has not differed significantly to the number that approached in 19/20, but the reasons for approach have changed. During the pandemic households have been approaching due to relationship breakdown and domestic abuse, and because they have been vulnerably housed and can no longer stay with friends or parents, rather than because of the loss of a tenancy. If the number of households approaching for these reasons remains constant into next year then overall demand on the service will increase as approaches due to the loss of a tenancy rise.

We are undertaking early prevention work with those households who approach because they are under 6 months' notice, trying to negotiate for households to remain in tenancies and, where this is not possible, helping to secure alternative housing. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to help households into alternative housing because of the lack of affordable private rented housing and the lack of social housing.

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Comment by Cllr Shirley Langford – Housing - Just a repeat observation. We must do something to ensure there is more social housing available for all.

Note from Janet Williams – Public Health & Housing Manager

Comment noted. This is a significant project which will be explored under the new structure involving several different service areas necessary to report fully on the options available and risks. Reporting on this will be captured when the new Strategic Plan is incorporated into the QBR during 21/22 Business Planning cycle.

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Measure NI155 Number of Affordable homes delivered (gross)

With the large Planning Applications that have come in, will this help towards the target? –
Ian Harper

Shaun Harrington – Development Manager

The influx of major residential planning applications is likely to result in an increase in the number of affordable homes secured. It should be noted however that the granting of planning permission does not necessarily indicate that the houses (including affordable) will be constructed and delivered in a timely manner, which would be in the control of the housebuilder / landowner. Furthermore, whilst TDC Officers seek to secure the maximum number of affordable housing for each site as detailed within the North Devon & Torridge Local Plan, National Planning Guidance does permit an applicant to submit a viability assessment to demonstrate if a development is viable. If it has been robustly demonstrated that a development is not viable then there is a potential reduction in planning obligations (Including affordable housing) to aid delivery. This may reduce the amount of affordable housing that is able to be secured within a planning application.

Page 28/29

Measure NI155 Number of Affordable homes delivered (gross)

Comment by Cllr Shirley Langford - Again a repeat observation. We must ensure there is more affordable housing available. It is interesting that the lockdown was followed properly on construction sites here and that it has therefore had a major effect on housing delivery. In other parts of the country many construction sites did not shut down and were not forced to do so.

Page 28/29

Measure LE140 Number additional properties added to the Council Tax data base.

Are other similar Local Authority areas experiencing the same level of decline? – **Ian**

Harper – Note TDC reduction is -169 / -93%

Harry Roper – Performance & Communications Officer

Emailed neighbouring authorities 4.11.20 on receipt of question. Answers will be provided verbally at meeting if available or in follow-up email to committee members.

In the interim North Devon Council advise their figures to have dropped from 419 to 231 (-188 / -45%) but they do not monitor the detail.

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Benefits Claims Processing Times

Did the HB delays cause any hardship? Were we able to offset any hardship caused? **Cllr Shirley Langmead**

Harry Roper – Performance & Communications Officer

It is not possible to quantify this although there was no spike in complaints received or indeed any formal complaints during this period. As stated, the issue was software related and beyond the control of TDC.

**Goal 3 – Protecting & Enhancing our Quality Environment –
Agenda Pages 31 - 32**

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TDC6 - Waste Review – Action W1.C – **Cllr Peter Hames**

1. Regarding item 3 - Innovate on materials that can be collected sustainably at kerbside - in this section could the TDC Waste and Recycling officer please report on what innovations are being discussed with the County Council which may increase recycling rates?

2. Bearing in mind the huge tonnage of mainly plastic waste which goes to landfill or incineration as a result of celebrating Christmas could the Waste Manager please report on any plans for TDC to:
 - publicise these waste figures,
 - ask the public to reduce the number of items they dispose of to the waste stream after Christmas,
 - encourage the hierarchy of reduction, re-use and recycling at Christmas and other festive times?

Richard Haste – Operational Services Manager

1. A lot of the decisions on the materials we can accept at the kerbside are taken at the district level with Devon County Council directing us as the waste disposal authority for the county advising us on where to take garden waste, food waste and residual waste. Our kerbside recycling service has been developed with the capacity of both the collection vehicles and our processing outlets in mind. We do potentially have the capacity to take additional household packaging plastics long term, but this very much depends on the ability of our end markets to absorb this material.

Our focus in recent months has been on coping with the additional demand the Spring lockdown created for our recycling services and ensuring that our collection rounds are optimised to ensure the most efficient utilisation of our collection fleet.

2. The Council communications team normally run a campaign discouraging the use of plastic based gift wrap and glitter products and encouraging the recycling of cards through special collection points, Christmas trees through the green waste collection and so on over the Holiday period. We also support the wider campaigns organised by our partners Devon County Council and organisations such as Recycle Devon, Recycle Now and Plastic Free Devon etc.

This will be supplemented this year by a further Christmas campaign coordinated through Recycle Devon – “20 Days of Christmas” 1st – 20th December - 20 helpful and budget friendly topics covering gifts, wrapping, food, decorations etc. The aim is to drive engagement and followers, through a prize draw to win 1 of 20 hampers of local Devon products (depending on lockdown availability).

Regarding plastic potentially being sent to energy from waste (we don't landfill any waste in Torridge anymore) it is hard to quantify how much plastic is being sent to disposal and so figures do not exist that could be used in any communications campaign. Some plastic does end up in residual waste due to mixed messages on what is recyclable being given by manufacturers and retailers. It may be useful to put together a campaign to encourage the public to maximise the amount of the acceptable plastics being recycled and to cut back on items such as films and food pouches being placed out for collection and the Communications team will consider this as part of their future campaign planning.

Goal 4 – An Effective & Customer Focused Council – Agenda Pages 33 - 38

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Measure LE701 End to End Times for Property Searches

Comment by Cllr Shirley Langford - Just for information, one local solicitor is sending out information in their packs about conveyancing saying that the pandemic has caused and continues to cause delays. They say that some local authorities 'particularly TDC' are taking at least 8 weeks to carry out searches.