

QBR – 20/21 - Q1 / June 2020 – Advance Q&A

Goal 1 – Prosperous & Sustainable Economy – Agenda Pages 18-20

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TDC 2 Skilled, Adaptable Workforce matched to business growth requirements –
Action ER4 –

1. When will the Economic Strategy be ready? - **Ian Harper**
Accepting the COVID 19 impact on the North Devon Economic Strategy when do we feel this will be ready to implement? - **Steve Dengate**
2. As stated, there is a need to identify the impact of Covid 19, will this include the Self Employed, also the current major job losses at Swallowfield and Appledore Shipyard. – **Ian Harper**
3. Better Broadband - Recognising the reality / attractiveness of working from home in North Devon (and also attracting people to the area) and the demand for reliable fast internet connection for delivering local business across Torridge is there a possibility to speed this development process up? What resources if any would be required for this? – **Ian Harper**

Chris Fuller (Note Sean on leave):

1. The development of a new Economic Strategy has had to be paused whilst we not only deal with the current economic situation but also plan for recovery. This will require us to be incredibly agile, not only as funding opportunities emerge but also to deal with issues as they are developing.
2. A redundancy programme has been developed in partnership with Devon County Council and DWP which seeks to gauge existing skill levels and interests to ensure that workers who have been made redundant are best supported either into appropriate training or to suitable opportunities. Surveys have been developed for employers and employees as the redundancy warning stage is reached and a support app is currently being developed by DCC to provide all key information on a local basis. We continue to receive various data sources which continue to predict potential outcomes, which do include ongoing reliance on furlough support and Self-employment income support.

Jon Walter:

3. Text Taken from the Connecting Devon & Somerset latest update:

Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) has launched its Fibre Extension Programme which will provide more than 8,000 homes and businesses with fibre broadband connections direct to the premises by the end of 2021.

CDS is funding fibre broadband connections to over 6,000 homes and businesses which will be delivered by Airband, and thanks to the high level of take-up of broadband services in the region from previous connectivity delivered by Openreach, CDS is re-investing a £6 million dividend to extend full fibre coverage to over 2,000 premises, again working with Openreach, thanks to the Government's "Gainshare" agreement with the company.

Overall, CDS has already delivered superfast broadband access to more homes and businesses than any other broadband programme in England – providing access to over 300,000 homes and businesses. Take-up of CDS funded broadband services is nearly 65% compared with a national average of 61.4%.

Airband will began engineering work in July in North Devon rolling it out to communities across northern, west and central Devon including:

Ifracombe
Croyde and Georgeham
Gunn
Molland and East Anstey
Bideford
Abbotsham
Hartland
Putford
Holsworthy
Clawton
Gulworthy and Morwellham Quay
Lewtrenchard and Chillaton
Yeoford
Cheriton Bishop

CDS' new collaboration with Openreach will expand fibre broadband coverage in particularly hard to reach hamlets and villages and deprived rural areas in Devon and Somerset. This is made possible through the Gainshare agreement with Openreach, under which increasing take-up of broadband delivered through the first phase of the CDS programme generates additional funds for reinvestment in new broadband networks.

Survey teams working for Openreach have now started to identify the best routes for these new fibre connections and this work will help shape the design of the local networks and ensure roll-out can happen as rapidly as possible.

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TDC 3 Encourage, support important employment sectors & projects. – Action ER5 –
Ian Harper

1. ND+ when will the performance measures be set out and agreed?

Harry Roper

1. These were due to be determined as part of the 20/21 Business Planning Process, but this was interrupted by the COVID-19 lockdown in March and a diversion of resources to deal with that. We should be able to resume work to define these dependant on how work levels and priorities develop going forward. They are in any case on the radar for when a more normal period of forward business planning can be resumed. ND+ performance is otherwise monitored through board meetings and other reporting mechanisms and Council representation on the board. They have in the meantime been very active in supporting businesses through the crisis and managing project streams such as the vetting of discretionary business grants etc.

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TDC 3 Encourage, support important employment sectors & projects. – Action H1 –
Ian Harper

1. Harbour Review – Minute 23 meeting 17/09/19 Estuary Strategy identifies that there has been no action plan as set out in The Estuary Strategy 2014. If we have responsibility for the foreshore, although District boundaries run down the middle, should TDC be addressing current issues?
2. With the recent issues over water-based activities, particularly jet skis, with only a voluntary code of conduct prepared by the Taw and Torridge Estuary Forum Board in operation, should the Estuary Plan be revisited, and the action points be considered?
3. Fish Dock; as a cost centre how did it perform, financially, last year and in quarter 1, is it being fully utilised with adjoining buildings.
4. Having now left the EU are we still constrained to the terms of the grant to build the Fish Dock?
5. Economic Regeneration – unemployment figures growing, as these do not include Self Employed, which represent 9.6%, June 2019, of those economically active and the growth those claiming Universal credit, those on the Furlough scheme, what can Torridge do to mitigate the local problems in addition to the work carried out by DCC and the Northern Devon Recovery Group?

Paul Labistour – Harbour Master

1. A further review can if required be taken to ascertain where the estuary strategy sits within TDC's strategic objectives and considered at the relevant committee.

- The voluntary code of conduct could be reviewed through Taw and Torridge Estuary Forum and further control measures considered at the relevant committee going forward.

David Heyes:

- We have included the Fish Dock without and with Central Recharges in cash terms the Fishdock was a cost to the Council of £7.7k in 2019/20 and has cost the Council £5.4k for the first quarter but note the business rates are paid in advance.

Fishdock for 2019-20 and 2020-21 Q1

Excluding Recharges and Depn:

	2019-20	2020-21 Q1	
Salaries	11,571.60	2,607.15	
Expenses	77,296.19	20,315.72	includes NNDR for year @ £12K
Income	- 81,093.82	-17,505.44	
	<u>7,773.97</u>	<u>5,417.43</u>	

Including Recharges and Depn:

	2019-20	2020-21 Q1	
Salaries	11,571.60	2,607.15	
Expenses	77,296.19	20,315.72	includes NNDR for year @ £12K
Depn	29,077.79	7,254.75	
Impairment/Revaluation	- 11,242.89	-	
Insurance	1,380.00	735.75	
Central Support	26,702.23	10,452.25	
Income	- 81,093.82	-17,505.44	
	<u>53,691.10</u>	<u>23,860.18</u>	

Paul Labistour – Harbour Master:

- Our understanding is that the outputs required by the EU grant to build the fish dock project have been fully met and TDC are no longer obligated to EU funding organisations. TDC Financial Services also advise that conditions regarding the grant received from the South West Development Agency expired in November 2018.

Chris Fuller (Note Sean on leave):

5. First off, the key will be working in partnership, as we have done, to ensure that resources and capacity is maximised. Significant funding applications, such as those for The Future High Street Fund (Bideford), to the Architectural Heritage Fund (The Globe, Torrington) and supporting Devon County Council's rural Mobility Fund application for Holsworthy all create momentum and self-belief for towns, which is key moving forward. But smaller projects also need rolling out to again create the vibrancy that is needed, In particular for retail, tourism and hospitality. At an appropriate point we will also need to revisit the Torridge investment grant which had been readied in March to support recruitment of a first employee, and work with relevant partners to appraise whether that is still the right tack or what would have the largest potential impact in the short to medium term future.

Goal 2 – Stronger, Safer, Healthier Communities – Agenda Pages 22 - 25

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TDC 4 Engaging & Empowering Inclusive Communities – Planning Policy Action PL2
- Traveller sites – **Councillor Langford**

1. I understand it would be silly to do work that becomes unnecessary if there is a newly reviewed Local Plan. Just for clarification, is the assumption that traveller needs would be included in the Local Plan if it is reviewed and updated?

Dawn Burgess:

1. The Local Plan Working Group, at its last meeting (4th August) indicated a desire to explore the option of undertaking a review of the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan (2011-2031) on an expedited basis. On this basis a report will be prepared for the consideration of both Torridge and North Devon Councils as to the approach and timescale to be taken to review the current Local Plan. The scope of the review will be a matter for the Councils to determine. However, in moving forward the Councils will have to be minded of the Government's intention to reform the planning system, which is set out in the White Paper: Planning for the Future, issued on 6th August:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907647/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf
The proposed changes are significant both in respect of planning policy and development management.

In undertaking a review of the Local Plan, the means by which Traveller accommodation needs will be addressed must be considered and determined. It may be necessary to alter the current approach of dealing with this matter

through a separate development plan document, but this is unknown at this time; the referenced White Paper indicated that national planning policy will be revised, which may give direction as to how Traveller needs should be accommodated.

Moving forward, irrespective of the determined approach to address the accommodation needs of Travellers in a revised Local Plan, it will be necessary to update the evidence base for the Local Plan, which may include evidence relating to the needs of the Traveller community with regard to location, scale and the type of accommodation required.

In the meantime, applications for new traveller sites will be considered against exiting Policy DM30: Sites for Traveller Accommodation.

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TDC 5 - Safe and Healthy Communities Action HREN1

1. When will the High Street accommodation be completed and ready for use, are there other potential properties identified? – **Ian Harper**

Adrian Redwood:

1. The project experienced a delayed start due to the Covid-19 situation and unfortunately, has experienced further delays to the work in progress due to the difficulty in sourcing key materials and resources. The project is now nearing the final stages of the fit-out and completion is expected by mid-September 2020 (two weeks behind the contract completion date). The situation is being monitored and the Housing Team kept informed. We are also experiencing delays in the delivery of the furniture and fittings that have been ordered for the accommodation, but not yet supplied.

In terms of other potential properties, there was a period when no new properties were coming onto the market. We monitor homes that are released on property websites daily and where possible seek to identify suitable premises that match the criteria of the Housing Team. Unfortunately, the type of property required is rarely presented to the market and on in other instances is often unsuitable. We have therefore concentrated our efforts on working with Private Sector Landlord providers to source appropriate accommodation. We have surveyed five properties post-lockdown and we are currently progressing negotiations with two separate owners.

In parallel with the above, we have also been re-visiting the potential sites for modular accommodation in anticipation of increased demand over the winter. To ease pressure on the service we have also taken the decision to defer the adaptations at Barton House in order to avoid compromising current capacity.

1. Recovery of loans how much is on loan?

Gwydion Batton (Financial Services)

Still outstanding - £212,148

The average long-term recovery rate is circa 67% with Circa 33% (1/3rd) being written off.

Typically, when a loan is agreed the maximum repayment period is 3 years although this may be extended in certain circumstances.

where someone re-approaches having defaulted on a loan within the last 7 years, we insist that they start addressing that debt (even if it has been written off on our records) before we consider further financial assistance.

In the majority of cases and mindful of affordability checks etc it is more cost effective to loan someone the money to pay their rent arrears or deposit than for them to become or remain homeless with the Council picking up the bill for housing them in expensive temporary accommodation.

With a loan we historically expect around 2/3rds income recovery, with Temporary accommodation we can only reclaim a small proportion back through the housing benefit subsidy. Accommodation such as B&B's and Holiday Homes are expensive, especially in the peak seasons, but the amount we can reclaim is based on Local Housing Allowance rate which is fixed.

We only have limited space in our own hostels and rentals and that capacity is currently further reduced because of COVID-19.

Helen Page: (Housing Options)

The vast majority of households seeking assistance from the Council are on a low income and require financial assistance to prevent or relieve their homelessness, whether that be by means of a loan or grant to fund deposit and/or rent in advance, or to address rent arrears and (occasionally) mortgage arrears. Where a duty is owed, we also assist with removal and storage costs, again by means of a loan or grant.

We have a statutory duty to prevent or relieve the homelessness of all households, regardless of whether they might require temporary accommodation. Whilst the legislation does not require that LA's offer financial assistance as a 'reasonable' step in assisting households failing to offer such assistance would hinder us from achieving successful outcomes. We are required to report on the outcomes achieved, and whilst it has not happened to date when the Homelessness Reduction

Act came into effect in April 2018 MHCLG indicated that future grant funding of homelessness services would be linked to our performance.

We assess the financial circumstances of every household we assist and where households have the ability to meet the cost of preventing or relieving their homelessness without financial assistance from the Council then they are required to do so.

We grant monies through Discretionary Housing Payments where possible and appropriate in order to minimise cost to the LA and household, but this fund is limited and there is other need not associated directly to homelessness, so our approach has to be measured.

We loan rather than grant monies from Housing Options budgets wherever possible, as this is the most cost-effective approach. We are aware of the cost to the LA of administering loans and the challenge of recovering monies from low income households, but a loan encourages households to take greater personal responsibility for their housing situation and, where a deposit is funded, greater care of the property. There is already a tendency for some of the more challenging households to repeatedly approach for assistance (which we are required by legislation to provide), and if we were to shift towards granting more funds it is likely that our overall spend would significantly increase.

We do not currently believe that the economic fallout from Covid-19 will significantly alter recovery rates as most of our customers are already low-income households. The pressure on budgets is more likely to come from increased demand from an increasing number of households requiring assistance because they are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Goal 3 – Protecting & Enhancing our Quality Environment

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TDC 6 Reduced Carbon footprint of residents & businesses. Action W1. **Councillor Peter Hames.**

1. Depot Relocation. Which other sites are being investigated for the Environment Centre?
2. Innovate on materials that can be collected. Is it feasible for the Council to collect and recycle polystyrene (e.g. polystyrene boxes, broken surfboards)?

Richard Haste:

1. There are other sites within the district which have been identified as possible options within the Bideford area. Officers are unable to release any more details due to only holding initial discussions with the owners and the commercially sensitive nature of the other site. The lead Member for Waste and Recycling as well as the Leader and Deputy Leader, are aware and informed of any discussions being held.
2. Unfortunately, it is not feasible for Torridge to provide a collection service for polystyrene. South West Metals in Barnstaple are working with Beach Care to recycle disused and broken surf boards, which are then recycled into building blocks. Polystyrene boxes can be taken to any DCC owned recycling centre, where it will be sent to an Energy From Waste (EFW) plant and turned into heat and electricity.

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Covid –19 Impact Report

1. Fly Tipping - Has there been a significant increase during lockdown? – **Ian Harper**

Richard Haste:

Q1 for this year has seen a rise in fly tipping events although not a significant one. Last year we had 37 incidents. This year we have 45 recorded events.

Proportionately the sort of waste being fly tipped is about the same with waste of household origins being the most frequently tipped. This can be anything from black bags to items of furniture.

There was slightly more builders waste tipped in Q1 this year (4 incidents this year compared to 2 last year). On the whole though the area fared pretty well during lockdown; The high police presence meant that suspicious looking activity including people in vans were more likely to be challenged about where they were going / what they were carrying and so there was actually a period of a few weeks with nothing being reported at all in relation to builders waste.

Goal 4 – An Effective & Customer Focused Council – Agenda Pages 28-33

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Property and Procurement Action PP2 & Service Commentary

Agreed Major Planned Maintenance, Capital Works, Asset Disposal Programmes - Victoria Park Maintenance.

1. Really great to have the park open and to see that equipment is maintained to ensure safe usage. So good to have the children back on there. Thank you. Are the upgrades/improvements/replacements on hold because of Covid 19 or are they waiting for the play strategy? – **Councillor Langford**
2. Covid 19 Service Commentary
Collaboration and sharing of roles with other organisations, coupled with staff working from home. Is this the way forward for TDC in meeting the cost constraint and delivering excellent service to the residents of Torridge? – **Ian Harper**

Helen Bond:

1. It is a combination of analysing the play strategy and consulting with Members but COVID-19 has unfortunately pushed everything back. Our priority at the moment is reopening the play areas and undertaking emergency works to keep them safe to use.

Sarah Ayres:

2. The Council and HR management are currently considering proposals for medium to long term staffing. They have undertaken the first of a series of HR briefings with South West Councils and other South West Authorities today to share learning and discuss a more consistent approach to some of the issues we all face.

We have had a large proportion of staff working from home since 23 March but have now taken steps to ensure the provision of a COVID secure workplace in order to bring some of these staff back into Council offices. Once the new management structure is in place, they will be tasked with reviewing any home working arrangements and consider whether this can be accommodated on a longer-term basis taking into account business needs.

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Revenue and Benefits

1. Revenue- Council Tax what is the predicted increase in arrears? – **Ian Harper**

David Heyes:

1. For comparison the C/Tax arrears at the end of 2019/20 were £2.3m and the arrears of Council Tax this year are expected to rise by £1.8m to £4.1m of which circa 12% pertains to Torridge Council - £216k.

However, the impact of the end of the Furlough scheme and its impact on resident's ability to pay for their Council Tax is difficult to predict.

Pages 34-51

Covid – 19 Impact Report

1. Parish Councils - Only 30% of grant spent, is there any intention to collect unspent monies and if so when? – **Ian Harper**

David Heyes:

Yes, unspent monies we will recovered (offset against) the 2nd payment of Town and Parish Precepts due at the end of September 2020.