

## QBR4 2021/22 – June 2022 – Advance Q&A

### Highlights (theme 1) – QBR Page 2

Evaluation Fund question from **Mr Harper**

Devon Evaluation Fund, how many businesses have registered?

**Vicky Feather, North Devon +**

In total, 48 Torrridge applicants have applied for DEF.

North Devon Futures Partnership question from **Mr Dengate**

Do we know when the dedicated resource is likely to be recruited and what is the anticipated date for the implementation of the plans?

**Steve Hearse, Chief Executive**

The additional resource has been recruited to via a secondment arrangement within Petroc. The Board is set up and starting to operate as we would expect i.e. reviewing strategically important documents for the area (Northern Devon) with the next meeting including UK Shared Prosperity Fund proposals and the Cultural Strategy.

Floating Offshore question from **Mr Dengate**

Good to see this initiative. What are the anticipated next steps for the project?

**Sean Kearney, Head of Communities and Place**

Full details can be found in the Floating Offshore Wind Opportunity Study report:

<https://www.regen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/HotSW-FLOW-study-published.pdf>

### Highlights (theme 3) – QBR Page 2

Consultation question from **Cllr Hames**

What has been the response rate to the People and Places consultations? Please supply figures.

**Dawn Burgess, Senior Planning Policy Officer**

The following consultation/survey responses were provided to the People and Place consultations:

Community Survey – 284 completed surveys

Statement of Community Involvement – 40 comments received

Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)

- HELAA methodology – 111 comments
- Site submission forms – 234
- Expressions of interest HELAA panel - 22

Note: the consultation outcomes and proposed response to received comments to the SCI and HELAA, relating to the methodology and panel composition, will be reported to the next meeting of the Joint Planning Policy Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> July.

## **Budget Narrative – QBR Page 5/6**

### **Training Costs Question from Mr Dengate**

Encouraging to see both the Apprentice Reserve and Trainee Graduate Succession Planning proposed for reserving. Can you advise if this figure also includes the additional training and mentoring costs for the respective schemes or does this fall totally on existing staff?

### **David Heyes, Finance Manager**

The funding includes allowance for training courses etc, e.g., the apprentices will generally spend a day a week at Petroc. The training will by its very nature fall largely on existing staff.

### **New Burden's Grant Question from Mr Dengate**

The New Burden's Grant of £380k is mentioned in both the adverse and favourable variances. Do we consider this sum will be sufficient to offset the cost burden and is there capacity to resource up staffing levels in this area?

### **David Heyes, Finance Manager**

The grant funding received for the various new burdens imposed upon the Council by Government exceeds the directly attributable costs. The prime issue facing the Council is actually securing the additional staffing resources to deliver on the additional workload burden imposed by Central Government whilst maintaining the delivery of essential services.

### **Northam Burrows Question from Mr Dengate**

How is the Northam Burrows treated as a cost centre and is there scope for increased revenue being able to be applied in part to offset the cost of climate change defences?

### **David Heyes, Finance Manager**

Northam Burrows is a cost centre like any other, it has expenditure items charged against it, mostly salaries for the wardens and gate staff. Income from access to the Burrows is also credited to this cost centre along with rental income from the café. The Council has budgeted for the increased revenue in its budgets for 2022/23 and beyond. If the "surplus" was to be earmarked for climate change defences corresponding saving would have to be found from other Council budgets.

## Budget Monitoring – QBR Page 7

Capital and Reserves Question from **Mr Dengate**

Programme Area - Environmental. What cost inflation are we building into these figures - if any?

**David Heyes, Finance Manager**

10% for 2022/23

## Budget Monitoring – QBR Page 8

Earmarked Reserves Question from **Mr Harper**

Note that this is still showing information as December 2021. Could the current position of Backlog maintenance be given, please.

**David Heyes, Finance Manager**

Page 8 of the QBR (Earmarked Reserves) could not be completed before the QBR was sent out to Members. The revised information was included in the presentation to O&S Internal and the QBR4 has been updated accordingly.

There is no value assessed for backlog maintenance (areas such as Leisure has had a fuller evaluation of the works to be undertaken). The balance held on the backlog maintenance reserves reflects monies set aside from previous years' surpluses to fund works as they become known.

## Local Economy (QBR Pages 9 – 12)

Levelling up questions from **Mr Harper**

Exeter University have just published their paper, Social Mobility in the South West, levelling up through Education

It identifies three areas where there are issues.

1. Low wage economy
2. Disconnected areas
3. Lack of impetus for change, leadership

What is Torridge and its partner, doing to meet the challenges identified in this paper?

**Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer**

- 1) Middle Dock proposals, in order to capitalise on the marine opportunities presented by Floating Offshore Wind, environmental intelligence, clean propulsion and also aquaculture, are at the heart of transformation of this picture, and the superb report is referenced a number of times in the developing bid. The work of Professor Lee Elliot Major also features at the heart of the North Devon Equality Plan, developed by the NORDAB collective of head teachers.
- 2) - supporting broadband rollouts  
- ongoing support for local co-working provision, e.g. advice provided in early 2022 to the High Bickington Community Centre and an introduction to the Devon Work Hubs programme which resulted in a support grant being secured.

### Steve Hearse, Chief Executive

- 3) The fact that we are engaging with the wider education and skills market and trying to bring the Universities into the work and projects we are developing, recognises the need to change and adapt.

The points Chris has made in the answer to the first question identify our ambitions to be forward thinking and looking at new advanced technologies where there are opportunities to do so bringing in investment into TDC and across Northern Devon with our wider partners. This is also well linked in and connected to the work of the Northern Devon Futures group.

## Local Economy – QBR Page 10

Globe Project question from **Cllr Hames**

It is stated that the Globe Project in Torrington has been ‘paused’ due to the owner seeking residential use of the building. Should ‘paused’ therefore read ‘terminated’?

### Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer

No, we remain committed to the value of the project and public support remains strong. Given the current cost-of-living issues, squeezing any potential investment into a community share issue, and the cost inflation impacting on the construction industry, this pause might ultimately prove beneficial and enable us to return to the scheme when it becomes clear to the current owner that without external funding support schemes are currently unviable.

## Local Economy – QBR Page 11

Connectivity question from **Mr Harper**

Connectivity, position of Jurassic and BT given, nothing regarding Airband, is this a communication issue?

### Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer

Airband have recently lost their Community Liaison lead, and since then we have not had any contact, nor has there been a significant marketing presence from them in the area to indicate activity. Jurassic have, however, now received approval from the Fields and Lands Trust and also C&R for the use of some space adjacent to Bideford AFC which will enable them to progress rapidly and have significantly increased their Bideford-area marketing.

Work Hub question from **Cllr Hames**

What are the uptake figures for the work hub at Castle Hill, Torrington?

### Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer

MONTH	HOT DESK BOOKINGS	MEETING ROOM BOOKINGS	TOTAL (£)
January	0	1	£30
February	12 (5 free days)	0	£55
March	3 (1 free day)	1	£95

## Efforts

- New users' first day free- This brought in a lot of interest, getting 6 users through the door and signed up.
- Valentine's day offer- £5 off next booking when booked Valentine's week. This attracted 1 user.
- Posters in shop windows throughout town showing that we are open.
- Instagram account created in January- allows us to reach a wider audience, have gained 88 followers. Facebook Reach figures hit a peak of 584 on a post in March, with some posts achieving 50+ engagements.
- A4 page advert in the Torrington Crier
- March launch event- Shown in the Gazette. Helped with word of mouth, those attended shared info about the hub.

## Challenges

- Node price dropped after we opened- they offer free courses, free parking, admin help to their membership, and we lost 2 potential users to them.
- Price of parking has put users off as not included in the membership.
- Covid- Jan and Feb tensions around Covid are high, people urged to work from home and not wanting to mix with other people.
- Most users that have shown interest already work from home and just need the space to get out the house on an ad hoc basis. The gradual onset of cost-of-living concerns from January through to March, coupled with Covid anxieties have translated into very limited use, although those users that have been in provide very positive feedback. These constraints have repeatedly been cited in users not being able to commit to a monthly membership.
- Targeting self-employed/freelancers but no way to access who they are in the surrounding area. This was also viewed as one of the key rationales for the hub and has long been a significant issue within the local economy- finding a way over the course of time to hook many of these sole traders and micro businesses into a facility such as the hub, even on a transient basis, to ensure they can be connected to businesses support, networking and future grant opportunities, and therefore support growth and job creation.

## **Local Economy – QBR Page 12**

Unemployment Rate question from **Cllr Langford**

Overall Torrington unemployment rate has fallen to 2.8%. Unemployment level in Bideford South has marginally increased. What figure has it increased to?

**Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer**

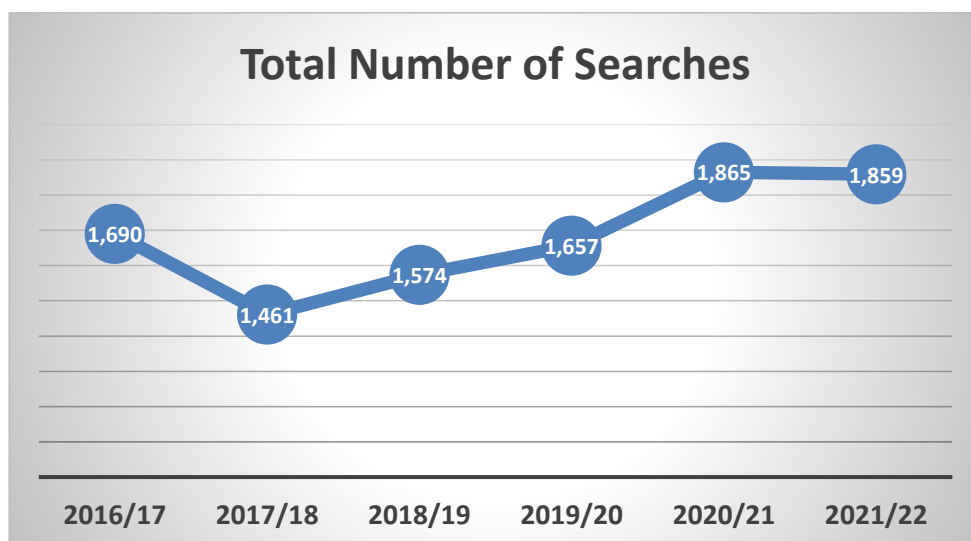
We have detailed claimant counts from the DWP for April 2022 and this showed an increase of 10 claimants in Bideford South. The same data showed a combined reduction of 50 claimants within the remainder of Bideford (East, North and West). The overall trend across Devon was down.

Land Charges Searches comment from **Cllr Langford**

LE701 end to end time for searches. This has improved. I appreciate there may be less workload because of resumption of stamp duty but it is still good.

**Chris Dobbs, Service Improvement Officer**

Due to continued activity in the housing market the workload for Land Charges has remained at a historical high. The improvement in this performance measure needs to be viewed alongside this ongoing high workload situation and is a good result.



**Communities, Health and Housing – QBR Page 14**

**Homelessness Strategy question from Cllr Langford**

Whilst I understand completely that it would be foolish to have a strategy which is almost immediately out of date, I would like to know a little more about the intention to adopt a revised Homelessness Strategy in conjunction with partner organisations. It sounds like a very good idea, but can you give us some idea of who these organisations might be and how advanced are discussions about the strategy or is it very much early days?

**Janet Williams, Public Health & Housing Manager**

As Cllr Langford points out, this is a regularly changing landscape however our current strategy does require updating to better reflect current issues and opportunities. Dialogue with Partners such as Encompass, Alabare, Livewest etc is regularly taking place. The strategy will include recent developments such as the current RSAP/Resonance bid (just awaiting the outcome on that), recent RSI (rough sleeper initiative) funding and plans, as well as the Hostel Funding reserve.

**Communities, Health and Housing – QBR Page 16**

**Disabled Facilities question from Cllr Langford**

Is the delay from accepted tender to start date because of lack of availability of workforce to carry out building works?

**Janet Williams, Public Health & Housing Manager**

Certainly an issue – compounded by building supplies issues too. We’re currently looking at a better way of presenting performance information on DFG’s – generally the bulk of our work is small scale – stairlifts, level access showers and minor adaptations. If straightforward these are carried out in reasonable timescales. However major adaptations such as

extensions are taking longer. This is in part due to difficulties in find contractors to quote for works (not just builders but everyone in the trade from architects to surveyors to project managers), and the lead in times given by successful tenders (some of which aren't available until next year). But we are also finding that the lack of choice in the housing market means that we are dealing with more complex cases where previously householders would have moved to more suitable or readily adaptable accommodation, they're now looking to adapt their existing.

## **Our Environment Our Future – QBR Page 19**

Play Strategy Question from **Cllr Langford**

20% of the funding for phase 1 of Victoria Park has been raised. This leaves 80% to be raised by Spring '23. This seems ambitious, especially if TDC do not commit any funding directly.

**Adrian Avery, Community Project Officer**

We are looking at the option of breaking it down even more now that we have costings. It would appear that most funders that we have approached are waiting for the landowner (Torridge District Council) to contribute before they do, so we are looking to go back in and ask for a commitment towards the main centre piece item.

Failing that, Councillor Langford is correct to highlight that Spring 2023 will be ambitious. Especially as a lot of funders are now not accepting applications of large sums like they used to pre covid. There could be further delays, but we prefer to stick with the existing target for now rather than keep pushing the date further back.

## **Our Environment Our Future – QBR Page 21**

Carbon Emissions Question from **Cllr Hames**

Can the carbon emission figures be broken down into categories e.g., transport, buildings? What is the target for reduction of carbon emissions for 2022?

**Janet Williams, Public Health & Housing Manager**

In May/June 2022 an internal audit was carried out for 'Torridge's Climate Change – Governance', which provided the Council with Reasonable Assurance on this key strategic matter. The audit report recommends a number of actions to further improve the collection and presentation of the Council's carbon data to enable clearer reporting on the path to net zero. These recommendations are currently being considered and will developed for the next carbon plan. When drafted this will be reported to the climate group/committee.

The Carbon estimate reported in the QBR is for the period 2020/21. This is the first recent assessment of the carbon produced by Council. A further carbon audit is scheduled for Q2 of 2022/23 which will estimate the picture for 2021/22. Having two years of carbon data will provide a better baseline of where the Council is now, and the degree of challenge to meet the net zero target.



## Our Council – QBR Page 22

Waste & Recycling Question from **Cllr Langford**  
Forgive my ignorance. What is WEEE?

### **Chris Dobbs, Service Improvement Officer**

WEEE stands for Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment recycling. Nationally, large household appliances (e.g., ovens, fridges, washing machines) currently make up over 40% of WEEE but there are large volumes of other equipment such as IT equipment (mainly computers), TVs (over two million discarded each year), small household appliances (e.g., kettles and hair dryers), electrical tools, digital watches, electronic toys and medical devices.

Torrige collects small household appliances as part of our weekly kerbside recycling collections.

## Addendum (Trend Analysis) Questions

Income Questions from **Mr Dengate**

Northam Burrows: Is this uptrend something we consider could be sustainable going forward?

Harbour – again do we see this improvement continuing?

### **David Heyes, Finance Manager**

Northam Burrows - The budgets for 2022/23 onwards assume a sustained increase in income for the Burrows; however, the sustainability of income source is unknown. As the world reopens and more people travel aboard there may be reduced visitor numbers to North Devon.

Harbour - The favourable movement on the Harbour is not sustainable as it incorporates significant items of a one off nature, such as returned employer pension contributions and staff vacancies.

Building Control Question from **Mr Harper**

LE 149 (New dwelling inspection) shows a decrease to 78%, is this income we are missing?

### **Sean Kearney, Head of Communities and Place**

Of course, if we achieved the 100% mark, we would be maximising our income. Historically, around the 80% mark has been our share of the local market and that is what we strive to achieve given a backdrop of increasing competition from Approved Inspectors. Marketing our services, creating relationships with local developers, builders and agents and differentiating our service based on quality are some of the things that the team are doing to maximise income and market share.

Complaints Question from **Mr Harper**

LE 260, time taken has increased considerably



LE 270 response down against target and previous years.  
Are these a problem of staffing?

**Sarah Ayres, HR and Communications Manager**

We have in recent years set up a triage service to try and deal with issues before they become formal complaints. Although this creates its own workload it has been quite successful in reducing the overall numbers that are formally investigated, 27 last year compared to well over 50 in previous years. However, Covid may also have suppressed the numbers as well, so we'll need to reserve judgement until a normal pattern emerges again.

As a result, some of the cases coming thorough for investigation are quite complex and there is an issue with officers having the time to investigate and achieve the 28-day deadline. However, at the same time with smaller numbers coming through any that don't achieve the 28-day deadline have a bigger impact on the average days taken and the % within time.

Last year there was one complaint that took 228 days to resolve, and this significantly skewed the average for the 29 complaints included in the totals – Note resolved figure of 29 is higher than complaints received, 27, as some were from previous year but counted from when they were resolved. If we remove this one case the average would have been 22.4 days and well within the 28-day target. It would also have raised the % in time from 82.8% to 85.7%.

**Complaints Question from Mr Dengate**

LE 260, what are the main areas of complaints being made. Are we comfortable with a 28-day service standard target to resolve these complaints?

**Sarah Ayres, HR and Communications Manager**

In 2021/22 we only received 27 new formal complaints. the highest proportion of complaints related to Planning (37%) with an additional 4% relating to Planning Enforcement. The second highest proportion was Environment Protection (18%). The third highest proportion was Council Tax (15%).

We are comfortable with the existing 28 day service standard (which is in line with recommendation from the LGO) and in late 2021 we provided training in complaint handling for additional officers which should help going forward.

**Customer Services Question from Mr Dengate**

Do we have any indication that the reduced visitor numbers are all having their needs met via self-service and do we feel accessibility for those without digital access is being adequately met.

**Sarah Ayres, HR and Communications Manager**

Based on the reduction in the number of formal complaints received in 2021/22 we are assuming that customer needs are being adequately met, especially as in 2021 we launched a new customer friendly website and enhanced our accessibility capabilities. The Council is in the process of finalising its updated Digital by Default Strategy and this outlines the measures we will be taking over the coming years to further enhance our customer's digital experience.

In May 2022 we re-opened our customer services hub and this has seen an upsurge in customers visiting the Council in person, so we continue to provide a range of options for customer interactions.

**Environmental Health Question from Cllr Langford**

Is there any narrative related to LE340a and LE348a which are red figures about E2E response to nuisance?

**Janet Williams, Public Health & Housing Manager**

We've always shown variable performance on these indicators but this is very much dependent on the nature of the cases being dealt with – some of our nuisance cases can be complex and take time to investigate/ resolve and these can skew overall results, such as investigations relating to events at venues where the response will involve a monitoring programme over the event season.

**FOI Question from Mr Harper**

Freedom of Information requests, what is the cost to the Council and do we get any help to meet these costs?

**David Heyes, Finance Manager**

The only directly attributable cost of Freedom of Information is the dedicated officer who acts as a coordinator for the answering of FOI requests) which costs around £12k. We do not record the time of the many Council officers who have to provide information for the numerous FOIs received. The Council does not receive any funding for the work undertaken

**Affordable Homes Question from Mr Dengate**

Noted new measure to be developed for 2020/21 Do we have any indication when this might be available?

**Helen Smith, Planning Manager**

We seek affordable housing at 30% of units on housing developments that meet the threshold (6+ units in rural areas and 10+ in urban areas). Policy ST18 of the local plan does however allow for a lower percentage to be achieved where this can be justified through submission of a viability assessment. We are currently in the process of reviewing the local plan and developing an evidence base to inform new policies, which will include affordable housing requirements