

Highlights (theme 1) - Agenda page 12

Question from Steven Dengate

A big well done to the team for pulling together the Investment Zone proposal in such a short timescale available. Based on the timelines indicated in the application process when would we expect to hear the outcome, and do we have an implementation timetable should the bid be successful?

Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer

The change of Prime Minister throws a lot of doubt over the investment zone opportunities. Part of the frustration throughout this process has been the lack of clear and defined information. There remains a significant amount of doubt around the precise nature of the full application process, due diligence and as such the resulting timeline to implementation. However, the example of Freeports would suggest that this would be a process over a number of years to establish the detailed business case.

Questions from Ian Harper

The Economic Team should be congratulated on funding applications shown. Could an update be given for all current applications, where we are with the process.

Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer

Political upheaval has made it difficult to accurately predict what will be given immediate focus by DLUHC and so what order announcements will come in, or indeed when they might be. The Levelling Up Fund is now expected to be announced in winter 2022 /23, but there is no clarity on the Shared Prosperity Fund.

We were unsuccessful with a bid to the Cultural Development Fund through the Arts Council (ACE), but this has acted to strengthen relationships with ACE which will be useful as we look to progress the culture strategy delivery. However, a large part of that was due to be delivered through the capacity to be provided through Shared Prosperity.

Performance Highlights (financial) – Agenda Page 13

Question from Ian Harper

These are much better reading with most up against budget and actual last year, however, within the lines shown are there any that are making a loss which are non-statutory?

David Heyes, Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer

The areas of non-statutory activity listed are

- Car Parks
- Northam Burrows

- Hostels – (however we operate hostels in meeting our statutory obligations towards residents at risk of homelessness)
- Rental Income – Corporate Property

All of the above make a positive cash flow contribution to the Council i.e. income exceeds their direct operating costs; however other factors would need to be assessed to make any true assessment of their financial viability, such as future capital investment (Resurfacing car parks, major renovation to Council owned buildings)

Salaries Monitoring - Revenue – Agenda Page 13

Question from Councillor Langford

Salaries monitoring - are the number of vacancies (12) up or down on the last QBR?

David Heyes, Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer

Essentially the same, it was 11.4 FTE last Quarter, please note the number of vacancies is just a snapshot the current non-operational vacancies as on the 30th September.

Investments – Agenda Page 16

Question from Councillor Hames

Please explain why the Council doesn't appear to have any green/ethical investments at present.

David Heyes, Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer

The Council's treasury policy allows it to prioritise green investments where the interest being offered are within 0.2% of market rates. Currently amongst allowable Torridge counter parties (UK registered financial institutions with Fitch F1 rating) there are three providers of green investments; Barclays, Lloyds, and Standard Charter. The penalty for green investments offered by Barclays and Lloyds has exceed the 0.2% allowed by the Council's treasury management policy. Standard Charter has a minimum counter party limit of £25m which is in excess of that allowed by the Council Treasury Management Policy and more than the total available funds the Council currently holds.

Budget Monitoring – Capital and Reserves – Agenda Page 17

Question from Councillor Hames

Can the Environment budget be used to make TDC buildings more energy-efficient?

David Heyes, Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer

Ultimately it is elected members at Full Council who determine which capital schemes are added to the capital program, the list below are the current capital schemes within the Environmental Capital budgets

Torrington Cemetery Extension	£157k
Torrington bowling Club Wall	£51k

Northam Burrow Estuary Work	£157k
North Burrows Gabions	£12k
Westward Ho! Seawall	£50k
Linear Defences Westward Ho!	£61k

Theme 1

Local Economy - Agenda Page 19

Question from Councillor Langford

Produce a Northern Devon Economic Strategy - It says 'progress needed'. What therefore are the immediate next steps?

Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer

We are working through the Northern Devon Futures Economy, Innovation and Skills Board to develop a detailed plan at the moment. This board contains private sector and education representation from across northern Devon to provide the key insights and steer. This group includes a number of larger employers, as well as early-growth and smaller businesses to provide a balance of perspectives. We are currently undertaking a series of scoping workshops and exploring key data sets to create the right foundations for the strategy. In early 2023 this will move into a more detailed phase of planning and sketching out the required elements of the strategy before moving into wider consultation, in all likelihood next spring, to align the initial work with wider thoughts and then move into more detailed writing.

Questions from Ian Harper

North Devon Economic Strategy, note that progress is needed, what is being done to expedite this?

As above

Support business and local economy, what are the actions in place to put this right?

Chris Fuller, Economic Development Officer

The Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund will provide significant direct support to local businesses, providing crucial finance to enable business growth, job creation and investments in productivity and sustainability measures.

Theme 2

Communities, Health and Housing – Agenda Pages 23 - 27

Questions from Steven Dengate

NI156: With the recent announcement of the £1.5m scheme for Homeless and Rough Sleepers what is the anticipated net benefit to meeting our target of 13?

David Heyes, Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer

This is difficult to quantify since the accommodation being procured is targeted at rough sleepers and will be one bedded accommodation.

NI156: Based on the implementation of the Homeless and Rough Sleepers scheme do we anticipate a material benefit in the current budget pressure of 288% and if so by what amount?

David Heyes, Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer

This is difficult to quantify and has not been factored into the Medium Term Financial Strategy forecast. Clearly any additional accommodation at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates will be of benefit to the Council in mitigating the current high levels of demand for affordable housing being faced by the Torridge Council.

Question from Councillor Langford

How much of a problem is, or do we foresee, the Ukrainian issue being, as those hosted locally come to the end of their initial 6 months?

Janet Williams, Public Health and Housing Manager

We realise we're approaching our first H4UK 'cliff edge' as we come to our first arrivals being here 6 months. We have taken a number of steps to minimise the pressures on our hosts and to try to maintain our placements for as long as possible – it is generally recognised that keeping our guests with their hosts is the best option all around. These measures include:

- Surveying all our hosts to determine their intentions after 6 months highlighting any placements where guests will be expected to seek alternative accommodation at the end of 6 months.
- Our contracted support service (Pickwell) monitoring placements and highlighting issues at early stage to determine additional assistance that may be required.
- From this month we will be providing thank you payment "top ups" dependent on the number of guests being hosted – currently the host payment is a flat £350 per month – this is increased on a sliding scale to up to £850 for nine guests.
- We have partnered with the CAB and have a dedicated officer working in Torridge looking at maximising income and support for both hosts and guests - at the moment she is specifically reviewing the benefits situation for our older guests, particularly with regard to winter payments and fuel support.

And where placements have or are looking at breaking down we now have a 'rematching' system, supported by a dedicated member of Pickwell staff. This is a joint service with North Devon so that the number of potential hosts available are increased with access to each others rematching lists. The service involves trying to match guests with new hosts with a view to finding the most sustainable placements, and supporting/ facilitating the move between them.

In addition, we have a number of guests who have successfully moved into the private rented sector (both within and outside the district), often due to securing work (there's been some real success stories in this regard) – in these situations we maintain contact with hosts to determine whether they would be willing to take on another placement should someone suitable become available through our rematching scheme.

We hope that the above measures will mitigate against the upcoming cliff edge and provide a more dynamic and supported network of hosts going forward. At the time of this response we have one

Ukrainian family in TA (who wishes to move to Ilfracombe) and one family who went into TA this week but due to move to their new hosts next week.

Given the situation in Ukraine, members need to be aware that the situation after 12 months is up in the air – the funding for H4U participants was for one year, so the funding/ support situation from Feb/March next year is unclear, at present the Government have given no indication what their intentions may be.

David Heyes, Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer

To date the Council has incurred £2,454 in costs associated with Temporary Accommodation for Ukrainians where the host family relationship has broken down. Payments for Ukrainian host families are continuing for a further six months (12 months in total). It is not possible to evaluate the future financial burden of the Council of further breakdown on relationships between Ukrainians and their host families; For information there are currently circa 28 host families hosting 66 Ukrainians.

Question from Ian Harper

Homeless Strategy, what is the current position?

Janet Williams, Public Health and Housing Manager

The draft update of our current Homelessness Strategy is almost complete and it has been agreed with the Chair that this document will be presented to the December 2022 Internal O/S meeting.

Theme 3

Our Environment Our Future – Agenda Pages 28 - 31

Questions from Councillor Langford

Play Strategy

I appreciate the work that has been done to repair/replace equipment and to improve some playgrounds. However, as Parish and Town Councils are reluctant to take on play areas (presumably because of the increased economic pressure on everyone) and the difficulties being experienced raising money for our own projects, is the Play Strategy which we are asking officers to implement ultimately flawed or does the position of 'slightly behind target' indicate that real progress can still be made?

Adrian Avery, Community Project Officer

Parishes have been asked if they would like to take on play areas but we have either received no response or a response of not wanting to due to financial pressures, especially when in an unsatisfactory condition which will cost the parish/town council to repair. We will keep exploring this. As it stands, all but 3 play areas will be up to a 'good' rated condition. Of those 3 areas, one is Victoria Park where we know that substantial funding is required and hope will benefit from Shared Prosperity Funding.

The other 2 are also larger areas where we have some s106 funding to spend (Short Close – Bideford) and engagement has already started with local families to determine the best for this site as is the same with Chestnut Drive (Bideford) where some ground works would have started on 31st October but unlikely to be completed by January depending on additional items required. There is a chance it could be completed but will depend on finances available and contractor availability which is difficult.

Waste and Recycling

The target date for the completion of the Environmental Centre and the date for the end of the current recycling processing contract are the same (early 2024). What are the implications? Is it a good thing, could it be a problem or does it not matter at all?

Richard Haste – Operational Services Manager

We are aware of this deadline and are working to ensuring that the new environment centre is operational before the agreement ends with Coastal Recycling.

Theme 4 Our Council – Agenda Pages 36 - 37

Question from Councillor Hames Planning Enforcement

What is the current number of enforcement cases being dealt with and compared with previous years?

Question from Ian Harper Planning enforcement

Could the actual number of cases that are current please be given.

Helen Smith, Planning Manager

The table below summarises cases between 2015 and 2022:

	A	B	C	D	E
	Year	Cases Received	Outstanding Cases West	Outstanding Cases East	Notices Issued
1					
2	2015	198	3	2	14
3	2016	259	1	0	13
4	2017	259	5	2	11
5	2018	323	20	9	8
6	2019	272	24	30	3
7	2020	269	58	28	2
8	2021	393	94	74	2
9	2022	approx 280 to date	98	88	11
10					
11					

We don't have the data to be able to compare open cases year on year and it would be fair to say that cases significantly accrued during officer absence between circa Feb 2020 and August 2020 when recruitment was delayed during the first COVID lockdown and more recently early August 2022 to mid-October 2022 due to long-term sick leave.

We currently have 541 open investigations – these include cases where notices have been issued and are awaiting compliance period/appeal or further action/investigation.

One of our two enforcement officers has just moved across to our Development Management Team and we have successfully recruited a new enforcement officer who we hope will start before Christmas (actual date will depend on references etc and notice period of 1 month). The new officer is an experienced enforcement officer, which should mean she can hit the ground running.

We will shortly be recruiting two planning apprentices and an element of their job role will be to carry out enforcement site visits and complete simple reports.