

QBR 2 – to end September.

Advance Q&A.

Budget Monitoring and Narrative

Question from Cllr Thomas Elliot

What is the total number (or average) of agency staff for vacant posts?

Currently we have 11 agency staff covering vacancies.

There are still over 20 posts vacant. How long has the longest ones been vacant and what is the issue with filling these, is it no one applying for them? or no one suitable/qualifications for the roles applying?

Of the 21 vacancies at the end of September:

- 7 have a new starter process in place (employment checks taking place).
- 8 are currently advertised.
- 6 have not yet reached the advertising stage, this could be because the vacancy has only just arisen, there is some work taking place before we advertise (e.g. job evaluation) or the position may currently be on hold.

Why are refuse vacancies not included?

Traditionally these are not included because the cover is short term to ensure rounds are completed. Of the below 13 vacancies all were covered by agency staff. Agency staff also provide short term cover for people who have called in sick on the day etc. Due to the short notice, this is managed daily by waste management each morning and changes daily depending on sickness need.

What is the number of refuse vacancies?

There are 13 vacancies in grounds maintenance and waste.

Of the 13 vacancies

- 7 have a new starter process in place (employment checks taking place)
- 6 are currently advertised.

Gwydion Batton, Principal Accountant

Questions from Ian Harper

Budget Monitoring

Forecast for a deficit at end of financial year of £9k, same as end of period 2.

During period 2 there was a short fall of £497k, following surplus of £472k, end period 1.

Is this a one off, or will things such as staff costs impact throughout financial year?

The forecast deficit for the year is £9k, this is not the actual deficit at the end of period 2. The shortfall of £497k and the surplus of £492k are forecast movements for the whole financial year, rather than actual movements within the reporting period, as such these forecasts include things such as the impact of staff costs throughout the financial year.

The actual revenue monitoring position shows a deficit of £3.49m against a profiled deficit of £3.981m (so £0.5m favourable) the overriding reason for the in-year deficit is timing differences, the funding income from the collection fund (Council tax & NNDR) is not brought into the ledger until year end.

Active Torridge, a revised contribution of £61k is this in addition to budgeted contribution?

This is in addition to the budgeted contribution.

Gwydion Batton, Principal Accountant

Budget Narrative

Question from Cllr Chris Bright

Can we have more information about the reduction in parking income mentioned on page 3 and 4, is there further insight into our stats?

- Approximately 60% of car parking income is generated over the first half of the year (includes summer months).
- This 60% is extrapolated to forecast where the income will be by the end of the year.
- The budget for 23/24 is £300K higher than what we received in 22/23.
- The forecasted budget has been reduced by £76K, to a budget of £223K more than 22/23.

For info:

Forecast Vs Budget:

Car Parking income (incl season tickets)	£'s	Reduction vs Budget £	%
Projected for 23/24	1,776,416	76,000	4.1%
Budget 23/24	1,852,416		

Vs Prior years:

Car Parking income (incl season tickets)	£'s	Increase on Prior Yr £	% Inc
Projected for 23/24	1,776,416	223,326	14.4%
Actual 22/23	1,553,090	162,327	11.7%
Actual 21/22	1,390,763		

Peter Hudson, Senior Capital Accountant & Deputy S151 Officer

Is it worth having an analysis around the length of time each person parks for each visitor? Or is it that businesses are cutting back on their permits? Any insight to this and would be useful.

It would take weeks of work to analyse the length of time each person parks and wouldn't necessarily be of benefit with regards to parking income.

There has been a change in parking permits since Covid as they now change across the whole year, so we need to wait until the end of the year to evaluate the impact of current prices.

Steve Macey, Parking Services & Parks Officer

Questions from Steven Dengate

Harbour & Pilotage

The average Q2 income over the last three years (2020/21 to 2022/23) has been £38,541 against an average budget over the same period of £40,385. **Source QBR reports. This quarter's income is 75% of this three-year trend, and the budget is 57% of the trend.

- 1) What is the methodology being applied to the budget forecasting for 2023/24?

The following methodology was applied when setting the income budget for Harbour & Pilotage for 2023/24:

- Pilotage increased by £6,941 (11.9%), which reflected the average increase in pilotage fees of 7% and £5,000 for increases in activity at the boatyard.
- Harbour increased by £840 (2.75%) on the prior year budget to reflect increases in the harbour fees.

The average for the 3-year period (2020/21 to 2022/23) was distorted due to an invoice which was raised to The Lundy Company in 2022/23 in quarter 2 for £16,332 which was consequently credited in December 2022. Historically, 75% discount had been applied to all services provided by the Harbour to The Lundy Company, in line with the Harbour's interpretation of the agreement. During 2022, it was identified that the 75% discount was only applicable to Pilotage, therefore the invoice raised for 2022/23 season was raised correctly. The Lundy Company stated, they did not know anything about this charge and refused to pay and consequently it was agreed this invoice would be credited. By removing £16,332 from the 3-year average, it reduces the average income to £33,097, against an average budget of £40,385 for the same period, which would result in the half yearly income being 88% of the three-year trend.

The Harbour's half yearly profile for 2023/24 of the budgeted income receivable as a percentage of the full year budget, was set at 69.35%, which is in line with actual income received at the end of period 6 for 2022/23 (removing the Lundy invoice of £16,332) of 69.97% against budgeted income.

The Pilotage's half yearly profile for 2023/24 of the budgeted income receivable as a percentage of the full year budget, was set at 46.15%, which in line with the average over the 3-year period (2020/21 to 2022/23) of 46%.

Sally Piper, Senior Accountant

2) What needs to be done to encourage big ships back or if this is not possible what plans are in place to increase the harbour income from alternative sources?

The entire shipping industry is notably sensitive to small variations in national, European and global trade. At present there is a significant down-turn in the European building industry which means that the demand for fine ball clay (a North Devon speciality) to be made into high end ceramics is at its lowest point for at least 30 years. Other causes are variously cited as being the Ukraine war and the increasing size of cargo vessels (Bideford capped at 90m).

Since the downturn, the Harbour Master has approached every shipping agent and company in the South to try and bring extra and different cargoes to the port – we have provided very competitive quotes for the import and export of timber, scrap metal, phosphates, steel, rock armour and any other commodity that might take cargo off the road and back to sea. To date there has been much interest, but nothing has materialised – such is the nature of the shipping industry that a very strong case has to be made to divert a vessel off an established and profitable route.

The situation will inevitably change because:

It is widely anticipated that the EU building market will revive in Q1 2024.

In Q4, HM will re-approach all the shipping agents to remind them that we are still here and open for business and prospects for shipping timber, phosphates, steel, scrap metal and any other cargo at reduced tariffs will continue to be progressed.

The prospects for the Appledore Maritime Innovation Centre should start to register in Q1 2024 bringing additional shipping.

The first landing of seaweed at Bideford from the trial offshore farm is scheduled to start in Q2 2024. The "Waverley," the "William and May", the "Fresh Spring" are all potential passenger carriers into and out of Bideford in 2024.

In the absence of commercial ships, we are using the commercial quays for berthing short term leisure visitors to the port.

The situation will be formally reviewed at the summer Bideford Harbour Board 2024.

Paul Brown, Harbour Master

On behalf of Richard Haste, Operational Services Manager

Theme 4

Our Council

Questions from Cllr Thomas Elliot

What incentives/schemes are there in place for staff retention?

TorrIDGE District Council offers a range of employee benefits including:

- Flexitime offering a better work life balance.
- Free parking during working hours.
- Option to join the Local Government Pension Scheme.
- Range of training and development opportunities including financial support and time off to study.
- Opportunities to gain professional qualifications and progress, for example loaders undertaking HGV training. Meaning progression for the individuals and assisting in recruitment for the organisation due to the national shortage of HGV drivers.
- Management training to support individuals' progression – recently 20 staff have completed either Level 2, 5 or 7 in management courses.
- Health and well-being packages (Lifeworks counselling and occupational health services).
- Retail discount incentives.
- Free will writing service.
- A range of social events, including cake sales, quizzes, sports day and the Christmas party, organised by the social events committee.
- Active TorrIDGE discount.
- Generous Local Government annual leave including the option to purchase additional salary traded leave.
- Office shutdown over Christmas (non-office based staff have leave added).
- Number of part time/flexible working patterns to suit individual's needs.

Sarah Ayres, HR and Comms Manager

Is our in-house maintenance team for the HGV side now at full complement? I remember a couple of meetings ago at full council, it was said that they are short and that is why Richard Haste was having to put his overalls on to help out.

Although I will put my overalls on if I need to, we are at full complement and have just taken on an apprentice.

Richard Haste, Operational Services Manager