

QBR 1 – end of June.

Advance Q&A.

Highlights.

Question from Ian Harper:

Page 4.

Adverse Variance Staff Wages

Agency costs £204.000 for quarter which could be £816,000 for the year, is there a budget line for this and have these figures been predicted?

The Agency costs of £204k is the projected overspend for the year, not the quarter. This overspend is a result of covering vacancies and providing additional resource to deliver outcomes from grant funded projects.

Sally Piper, Principal Accountant.

Key Income Streams

Question from Ian Harper:

Page 6.

Building Control, down against last year and budget, have our charges increased from last year, are we getting work from the new builds?

There was an increase in January 2025 but not April as we had already upped by 10% on most works and we are in a competitive market against private sector Registered Building Control Authority's (RBCA).

If I put the fees up too high, too quickly, there is a chance that people will go to one of these other providers, so I have to strike a balance. I believe the current figures are looking healthier to date following the January increase and we will be looking to review again later in 2025.

Fees for full plan applications are split into plan fee and Inspection fee so we will take an initial fee to check the details provided but won't collect the rest of the fee until works commence and that can legally be anytime within 3 years of submission and acceptance.

In answer to the New Builds Question, the smaller local developers such as Pearce Construction, Chichester Homes, NG homes and more recently Allison Homes have engaged our services but the large national builders such as Bloor, Bellway, Redrow use NHBC for Building control as they negotiate a fee nationally and provide a warranty. We do not have any powers to control any of these works or benefit from any fees or even get the opportunity to offer a service. We receive an initial notice which we register on our system to maintain a register and that's it. We would only get involved with a particular project if there is enforcement as the RBCA don't have the legal power to prosecute only LA. We would charge a fee for dealing with this prosecution.

Unlike most other council departments building control is in direct competition across the board for work. Private sector Registered Building Control Authority's operate in our area all bidding for the same works. Unlike the local authority with our set fee schemes the RBCA's can name their fee for a project.

LA Building control must adhere to fee regulations guidelines set by government to break even with a slight tolerance either side we are not able to make vast profits like the private sector.

We try and maintain a good working relationship with local architects and most still recommend us for our service, but it is client's choice.

Currently the RBCA's can also offer other services such as warranty, thermal calculations, Structural Calculations, sound services as a package which we as a local authority cannot which also means even some of the smaller developments go elsewhere.

This commercial enterprise is being reviewed by a government review panel led by Dame Judith Hackett on the back of the Grenfell enquiry response. This panel will decide on things from commercial conflict of interest to whether the whole building control process is taken into a national authority body and away from LA or private sector entirely and are due to announce findings later in the year.

If councillors are interested the identified problem statement under review can be found here [Building Control Independent Panel – problem statement - GOV.UK](#)

We are trying our best to keep the balance and maintain market share but unfortunately a mandate to build, build, build from central government does not mean we will see a large financial benefit.

Martin Setherton, Building Control Manager.

Salaries monitoring

Question from Ian Harper:

Page 7.

Salaries are recorded as an adverse variance above yet shown as actual being below the budget?

The adverse salary variance of £222k relates to the projected overspend for the year. The favourable balance of £122,710 relates to the actual salary position v budget up to 30 June 2025, this does not include the 2025.26 pay award which has now been agreed, the backdated pay award has been included in August salaries.

Sally Piper, Principal Accountant.

Budget Monitoring

Question from Ian Harper:

Page 7.

Agency Backfill, note is committed, could an explanation be given please?

Leisure Reserve, £781,641 could this line be explained please?

Project Management, £100,000 could an explanation be given please?

Agency Backfill - £100k approved by C & R 24/07/2023, which is a reserve available to cover agency costs in the event of an overspend.

Leisure Reserve, £781,641 – Reserve for costs relating to Leisure services and charges, of which £225k is committed towards Holsworthy Pool works approved at FC on the 14/10/2024 and £506k committed towards Bideford Town Hall, approved by FC on the 14/10/2024.

Project Management, £100,000 – reserve approved by FC 17/10/2024 to provide additional capacity to TDC to prepare and facilitate capital investment.

Sally Piper, Principal Accountant.

Question from Cllr Hames:

Page 9.

What are the four general vehicles to be replaced and at what time this year?

The four general vehicles relate to Environmental Protection and Operational Services which are within the Vehicle replacement program for 2025.26. The timescale for replacement is the responsibility of the individual Head of Service.

Sally Piper, Principal Accountant.

Question from Stephen Dengate:

Page 7.

Whilst it is good to see that the staffing requirements are currently being met, the variance seems high and would be significantly over budget if the trend continues. What are the expectations on total agency costs for Q2-Q4 as a percentage of the budget for staffing.

The projected salary overspend of £222k is the projected salary overspend for the year, not the quarter. Of which £204k relates to agency overs, which is a direct result of covering vacancies and providing additional resource to deliver outcomes from unbudgeted grant income received. The total expectation on total agency costs for the year is £775k, which represents 6% of the budget for staffing, which is in line with 2024/25.

Sally Piper, Principal Accountant.

Question from Stephen Dengate:

Page 6.

It is encouraging to see Northam Burrows's income increasing. With increased use and traffic flow, is there a need to have some marshalling/attendants during peak periods to help people park at the beach end (by the RNLI area) to protect the integrity of the infrastructure?

Normally there is no need to employ staff to marshal the car park as there is plenty of space for everyone. However exceptionally busy days can occur when we can experience congestion as well as inconsiderate parking which inconveniences other park visitors. On these occasions it would be beneficial to employ additional staff to marshal the carpark, but as these occasions only occur a few times in a season, and it is hard to predict exactly when they will occur, it is unrealistic to expect staff to wait on standby for the opportunity to work on a busy day. Staff could be employed on permanent basis, but this would increase costs significantly, and unless these costs were passed on to customers, Northam Burrows would be run at a loss.

We are constantly looking at alternative parking payment systems which may enable us to operate more efficiently. With better use of technology, it may be possible to implement a system that enables the current workforce to spend less time processing payments and more time managing parking.

Mike Day, Lead Ranger.

Theme 1

Local Economy

Question from Cllr Hames:

Page 12.

What are the 'challenges' around the business case for the Bideford-Barnstaple rail link?

The business case for the Barnstaple- Bideford rail link has not yet been fully submitted despite a request to do so, not enabling us to fully delve into the realities of the detail and implications.

Chris Fuller, Economic Development Manager.

Question from Ian Harper:

In the last year how many companies have relocated, or set up local branch, in Torrridge?
How many companies have closed down and moved from Torrridge last year?

According to Nomis, in 2024 there has been a reduction in of 25 businesses on the 2023 figures. Figures for the specific details are not available.

Chris Fuller, Economic Development Manager.

Theme 2

Communities, Health and Housing

Question from Cllr Hames:

Page 25.

When will the tender package be presented regarding cost and energy saving measures relating to TDC properties?

This is ongoing – meetings have taken place but as yet, no date has been set.

Harvey Gardner, Estates Manager.

Theme 3

Our Environment, Our Future

Suggestion from Cllr Hames:

I also suggest that under the Environment section the QBR should refer to a climate survey approved by the Climate Emergency Working Group and planned to go out to the public this autumn.

Noted and passed on to the Council's Sustainability and Climate Officer.

Harvey Gardner, Estates Manager.

Theme 4

Our Council

Question from Cllr Hames:

Page 35.

Given the low priority enforcement figure compared with last year and the fact that Torridge is a rural area is it the intention to recruit another enforcement officer?

Helen Smith is presenting at the meeting and will cover this in her presentation.

Question from Stephen Dengate:

Page 35.

EF2-EF4 How soon will the proposed changes take to come into effect once endorsed by the relevant committee and what percentage improvement/impact will this make to those involved in the enforcement process?

Helen Smith is presenting at the meeting and will cover this in her presentation.