

Full Council 25 July 2023

Members Questions

Questions from Cllr MacGregor

Questions to the Leader

1) At the Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2 meeting held on the 11th July 2023, the election of chair and vice chair saw Cllr Sanders and Cllr Buscombe elected Chair and Vice Chair respectively - the second example of an overview and scrutiny committee chair and vice chair being populated by the administration group. In the induction training for the new and existing council, was a very good presentation and Q&A session by the Centre for Governance was delivered on..... to many of those present in the meeting including the new chair. As part of that presentation, it was made repeatedly clear that the ruling administration should NOT chair the overview and scrutiny function as this would (as Cllrs Bullivant, Purser, P Parker and Hall) would be the administration 'marking its own homework'.

In light of that presentation, can you explain why their advice was completely ignored and dismissed

Response from the Leader

The Committee is responsible for Overview as well as Scrutiny. As the CfGS made very clear, the largest value of the committee is in the overview and scrutiny of future plans and influencing future decisions rather than spending all their time scrutinising decisions already made.

Every member of the committee can highlight items on forward plans and bring them into the workplan, not just the chair.

I have every faith that the members of the committees will build a workplan and working groups that add value to the council and our decisions, and not just focus on reading someone else's homework. This will reflect a new and better way of O&S working, and we will review it and participation in due course.

2) what was the cost of the centre for governance report and presentation?

Response from the Leader

The content of the training programme for returning and new cllrs was set up and agreed by the procedures committee in the previous term of administration.

3) For the last 4 years the Local Authority has had a series of challenging financial issues and most recently, the authority has made it clear that there gaps between expenditure and income with the values ranging in size from a £1.3m to 2.6m shortfall by 2026. The emphasis on future budget planning is on cost cutting and increased income. It's likely there will be a combination of these aspects. With that in mind, can the leader explain why he has chosen to increase the number of portfolios from 8 to 9, with the additional costs involved in that decision?

Response from the Leader

The future potential budget shortfall is principally due to the removal of some millions of pounds of Government funding from Business rates retention and the New Homes Bonus future funding. This is a serious challenge that the council needs to tackle.

The number of members of the Executive committee has remained the same and is fewer than the constitutional allowance.

Question from Cllr Lake

Questions for the Executive Member for Planning

4) Why had the full time qualified number of planning officers deteriorated from the last administration 12 officers down to 4.5 ?

5) Also why has the backlog of applications reached such a level not ever experienced by the last administration that the current administration has had to employ a private consultant to clear the backlog at increased expense to the council and tax payer ?

Response from the Executive Member for Planning

Answering Question 4 and 5:

The Council have an establishment of:

4.5 Planning Officers
3.8 Senior Planning Officers and
2 Principal Planning Officers.

We do have around 1 FTE vacancy in the establishment at the moment and are advertising this.

This core planning officer resource has remained unchanged for a significant period of time.

In addition we have contractors / consultants / temporary officers funded through specific projects.

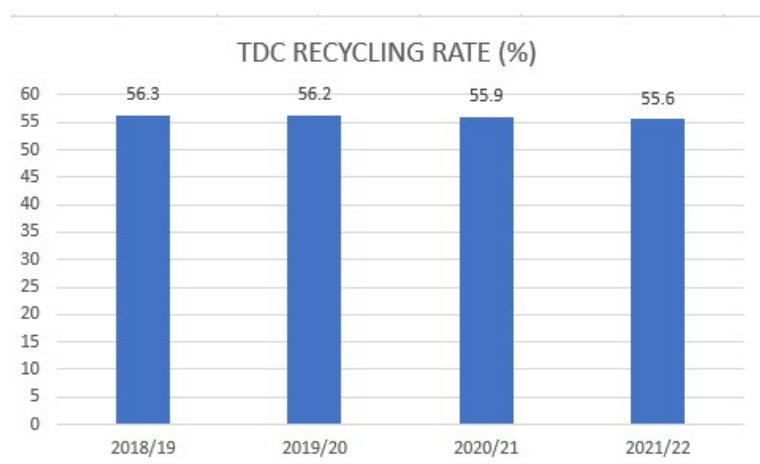
This is of course all in addition to the Planners in our Spatial Planning and Delivery Team.

Questions for the Executive Member for Recycling, Household Waste & Environmental Health

6) Can the portfolio holder say whether over the last four years the recycling figure has increased by what percentage and what plans are in place to increase it further in the future to compete with Devon's top district EDC

Response from the Executive Member for Recycling, Household Waste & Environmental Health

The recycling rate has remained relatively static over the last 4 years, fluctuating by less than 1%. The chart below shows the district's rates for the last 4 years for which finalised audited data is available. The national 2022/23 figures are expected to be released in October.



The Teignbridge10 point plan from 2021 has delivered a number of outcomes, including the introduction of charges for side waste and increased additional bin charges. Work continues on the remaining actions. The link below provides further details.

[20210302 Exec Increasing Recycling Rate 20210216.pdf \(teignbridge.gov.uk\)](#)

We are waiting for the outcomes of the various Government consultations. The 'Consistency', Deposit Return Scheme and Extended Producer Responsibility consultations will be considered before any significant service changes

7) Does it agree that EDC has reached their top figure by weekly recycling alongside three weekly residual black bin waste ?

Response from the Executive Member for Recycling, Household Waste & Environmental Health

It is widely accepted in the waste industry that a move to 3 weekly residual waste and weekly recycling collections increases recycling rates in areas where residual collections have previously been more frequent.

Questions from Cllr Daws

Questions for the Leader

8) Can the council members and public please be reappraised on all the costs to date that have been borne by TDC in the preparation of the FHSF bid with specific reference to the aborted Quarterbridge plans, market hall, new look cinema and Alexandra Theatre to include all costs and include member and officer time, consultancy costs, architect cost and any other specialists. Can this appraisal also include a forecast final spend and confirmation of what budget these costs will come from should the FHSF project not attain the grants as originally envisaged?

Response from the Leader

A briefing session for all Members is being arranged to provide an appraisal of the finances for the project, which covers the points raised in the question, as part of an overview of the information submitted Project Adjustment Request that was signed off by Government last week.

We continue to review the project, to ensure that it remains on track and that any risks are monitored and managed.

Question for the Executive Member for Sport, Recreation and Tourism

9) Can the Councillor confirm that it is accepted practice that the local ward members are kept across developments, and kept up to date, and involved in on all matters that are under his portfolio?

Response Executive Member for Sport, Recreation and Tourism

It is accepted practice that local ward members are kept up to date as suggested.

Occasionally this might not have happened, and if that has happened, I would invite the member to contact me directly with the details so that it can be resolved.

Questions from Cllr J Taylor

10) Why do Councillors not have water, tea and Coffee provided at meetings?

Response the Leader/Executive Member for Corporate Services

In the past Members paid a contribution for their tea and coffee. For the past 3 years it was felt that taxpayer's money shouldn't be spent providing teas and coffees and this was part of our budget saving ideas. Officers provide their own when in the office. Water, coffee making facilities and a vending machine is available in the Loft room which is always open to members. Since Covid, most Members bring in their own bottles of water for meetings.

I'm happy to consider any suggestions that do not incur extra costs to the taxpayer.

11) Does the current Consultation process meet best practice guidelines?

Response Executive Member for Corporate Services

Yes. All consultations are carried out in line with the Gunning Principles, and we have our own consultation principles, both of which can be accessed on our website, under 'about' - [Consultation and community engagement - Teignbridge District Council](#)

If any Cllr has any queries regarding a specific consultation, please contact Democratic Services or myself directly.

12) Why are the council intending to increase car parking charges by 9%?

Response Executive Member for Corporate Services/Executive Member for Economy and Jobs

As reported in the Executive Meeting and as mentioned in previous budget updates, we will be considering a mid-year review of Fees and charges.

There is further work that both Overview & Scrutiny Committees are engaged in, and we will be report to Full Council in due course.

Questions from Cllr Bradford

Question for the Leader/Corporate Services

13) Why do TDC not fall in line with best practice from other councils, including locally Devon County Council and Newton Abbot Town Council, and schedule meetings outside of the peak holiday season of August.

Response from Leader

Only essential and statutory meetings are typically scheduled in August.

Question for the Executive Member for Sport, Recreation and Tourism

14) *Considering the very limited amount that the council earns from fishing permits at Decoy Country Park, does the portfolio holder think the damage from discarded fishing equipment to birds and other wildlife at the lake is worth it?*

Response from Executive Member for Sport, Recreation and Tourism

I am not clear if the question is suggesting that fishing at Decoy Country Park is banned? If so, perhaps the Cllr would like to bring forward a Notice of Motion for the council to consider.

I will put information into the Members Newsletter how much revenue fishing permits bring into the council, and details of actions to minimise and damage from discarded fishing equipment.

Question from Cllr MacGregor

Question for the Leader

15) *The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny report emphasised the need for councillors to "respect the officers for their professionalism and their expertise". The recent standards/code of conduct training delivered recently by Bethan Evans also emphasised a positive trust based relationship between members and officers. Will the Leader of the Council commit to avoiding the disappointing, disrespectful public spats with senior officers at Exec meetings in future?*

Response from the Leader

I respectfully disagree with the premise of the question.

16) Question from Cllr P Parker

Question for the Executive Member for Sport, Recreation and Tourism

Separately how much has been spent on leisure services in the rural and the urban areas in the last four years, eg play areas, swimming pools, leisure centres and community buildings.

If this is not possible, could I have a list of the expenditure and I can work it out myself.

Response from the Executive Member for Sport, Recreation and Tourism

Due to the complexity in obtaining all the answers and the present workload of officers in finance, I trust the information in attached details will be sufficient to answer the question. Should further information be required, I would invite the Cllr to contact me directly.

See attached details on capital expenditure.

Question from Cllr MacGregor

Question to the Leader

17) The current administration made a number of statements and comments during the election. On this specific point, the Liberal Democrats stated they would maintain the level of support to existing voluntary sector organisations. In the budget agreed in February, the amount allocated to existing voluntary sector organisations was maintained at the same level as the previous year.

Can the Leader establish the real terms cut in support that decision represented bearing in mind the inflationary pressures and increased cost burdens encountered by everyone including the voluntary sector and will he commit to adjusting the contribution in future to account for historical inflation and for inflationary pressure in future to avoid further real terms cuts and failing to meet the promises made to residents?

Response from the Leader

Support levels for the voluntary sector will be reviewed by the O&S committee in the autumn, and the executive looks forward to their input into the budget discussion. I would ask the member to contribute to that work and help the Council deliver a good result.

Question from Cllr Parker

Question to Executive Member for Planning

18) 106 and CIL payments for developments paid to the council. Do the payments that are received have to be spent in the town/village that the development takes place or can it be spent across the district.

If it is to be spent in the town/ district in which the development takes place is the a national policy or a Teignbridge policy.

Response from the Executive Member for Planning

For S106 agreements, each site is governed by an individually drawn-up legal agreement and the conditions around how contributions can be spent are laid out in the agreement. They vary in how specific they are, but the majority are tied to the town or parish in which the development sits. For example, in the following agreement, the outdoor recreation facilities contribution must be spent within a 3-mile radius of the site.

[12_00301_MAJ-Section_106_Agreement-642305.pdf \(teignbridge.gov.uk\)](#)

CIL is different and the rules are set out in government legislation (however an easier guide is available on gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/community-infrastructure-levy>)

TDC collect the levy. Either 15% (if no neighbourhood plan) or 25% (if neighbourhood plan in place) is passed over to the relevant parish.

TDC are entitled to up to 5% towards the costs of administering CIL.

The balance must be spent on infrastructure. Details of this are reported annually:
Community Infrastructure Levy - What is CIL spent on? - Teignbridge District Council

Question from Cllr Daws

Question to the Leader

19) Can you confirm if TDC has carried out fully the recommendations of the Local Government Ombudsman as outlined in the report of the 21st December 2022.

Response from the Leader

One item remains to be confirmed and published – the consolidated version of the processes already modified. This is to be considered at the Standards committee meeting later this week, as per the published agenda.