

Report to: Council



Date of Meeting 16 July 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Questions on Notice

Report summary:

The constitution provides that members of Council may ask: the Chair, the Leader or a Portfolio Holder Member of the Cabinet; or the Chair of any Committee or Sub Committee a question on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the district.

A member may only ask a question if either:

(a) they have given at least 3 working days' notice in writing of the question to the Chief Executive; or

(b) the question relates to urgent matters, they have the consent of the Chair to whom the question is to be put and the content of the question is given to the Chief Executive by noon on the day of the meeting.

In response to a question on notice an answer may take the form of:

(a) A direct oral answer;

(b) Where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication; or

(c) Where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to the questioner.

In accordance with the Constitution two questions on notice have been received and they are set out in the report with the responses.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

To note the responses to the questions on notice.

Reason for recommendation:

In accordance with the Council's Constitution Rules Part 4, 9.2 Questions on notice at full Council; 9.3 Notice of questions.

Question	Question from	Question	Response
1	Cllr Stuart Hughes	<p>Question to Portfolio Holder Environment – Operations</p> <p>Given that the Sidmouth Esplanade railings—an iconic feature of our town’s Regency-era seafront—have only been repainted twice in the past 15 years, most recently through a £16,000 restoration effort, and considering they now show visible signs of deterioration, can the Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Spaces confirm whether there are plans to repaint them in the near future? Furthermore, could this form part of a longer-term, proactive maintenance programme to preserve the historic character and visual appeal of Sidmouth’s seafront as a whole—particularly in light of the important role the Esplanade plays in shaping visitor impressions and supporting the town’s tourism economy?</p>	<p>We have a programme of annual inspection and maintenance across all our public realm assets, but with our capital programme limited due to government budget pressures, we have to focus repair and maintenance on priority health and safety issues. We don’t have enough in our capital programme to actively invest in asset improvements across all our estate. We bring budget submissions to the annual BSCAP meeting for Members to decide on the priorities against the available and affordable capital. Our Engineers are inspecting the railings at Sidmouth every 6 months, and on each occasion areas of rust which are affecting the structure are being repaired and painted. The overall paint condition is not great but does not present a health and safety hazard. The railings’ structure is now at a point that re-painting alone won’t be enough and replacement should be considered. However Members will need to decide on the affordability of this given it isn’t currently a health and safety hazard. Engineers will submit a capital bid for 26/27 for ELT, Cabinet and BSCAP to consider replacement, against other identified capital requests.</p>
2	Cllr Stuart Hughes	<p>Question to Portfolio Holder for Finance:</p> <p>In light of the ongoing cost-of-living pressures on East Devon residents, would the Portfolio Holder consider reviewing our current council tax debt recovery procedures to ensure greater</p>	<p>In light of the ongoing cost-of-living pressures on East Devon residents, would the Portfolio Holder consider reviewing our current council tax debt recovery procedures to ensure greater leniency—specifically by introducing a minimum 28-day grace period between the</p>

		<p>leniency—specifically by introducing a minimum 28-day grace period between the granting of a liability order and the instruction of enforcement agents/bailiffs, during which a personalised repayment plan could be explored?</p>	<p>granting of a liability order and the instruction of enforcement agents/bailiffs, during which a personalised repayment plan could be explored?</p> <p>In relation to the specific question:</p> <p>Prior to a liability order being granted we have statutory recovery documents that we have to issue as a minimum when a council taxpayer falls behind with their instalment plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st reminder • 2nd reminder (sent where a resident pays on a 1st reminder but falls behind again) • Final notice • Summons • Liability order notice (once issued by the Court) <p>At all of these stages we encourage council taxpayers to engage with us if they are struggling to pay in order to set up repayment plans. Once a liability order notice is issued and we receive no contact, or payment is made then after at least 14 days each case is looked at by a Council Tax officer. They will carry out further attempts to contact the resident this will including phone, text, email or letter. Where there is no engagement from the resident, we will also consider alternative recovery options such as attachment of earnings/benefits or a charging order or passing the case to the Enforcement Agent. The majority of cases do have at least a 28-day grace period before being passed to an Enforcement Agent. From our data since April 2024 until May 2025 only 1% (7 cases) were sent to an Enforcement Agent in less than</p>
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			<p>28 days with the earliest being on day 27. We therefore don't consider there is a need to review our current recovery procedures to build in a minimum 28-day grace period as there will be instances where residents refuse to pay council tax rather than being unable to pay and it's important that we retain that flexibility if required. The Council is very aware of the cost-of-living crisis and the impact that it is having upon our residents including paying their council tax. Residents falling into arrears with their Council Tax can be a key indicator of someone who is struggling financially, and we therefore recognise the importance of supporting our residents by making sure we take into account the council's anti-poverty strategy in the collection of council tax.</p> <p>Some of the key measures that we have implemented as part of our anti-poverty work are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing up to 100% Council Tax Reduction (CTR) for our lowest income households. The Council made the scheme more generous from April 2023 for those on low incomes which included increasing support up to 100%. This means our lowest income working age households have been lifted out of paying altogether. We reported to Cabinet in January 2025 the reduction in arrears for those claiming CTR had fallen from 19.7% in July 2022 to 13.69% in December 2024. This demonstrates how the Council has delivered real help with Council Tax to some of
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			<p>our lowest income households in East Devon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a dedicated Financial Resilience team within our Revenues & Benefits Service where Council Tax staff will often refer cases in for wider financial help. Along with providing emergency financial help they will work with residents who are struggling to afford paying essential bills by reviewing their income and expenditure and identifying ways this can be improved along with working with other partner agencies. In 2024, 291 referrals for more in-depth work were made and this achieved average weekly savings of £148. • As part of our corporate debt policy, we are also implementing the Vulnerable debt toolkit so that Council Tax staff can be better trained in identifying residents with vulnerabilities enabling them to provide the appropriate support including better tailored repayment plans, referral for debt advice, etc. This a government backed toolkit and is recognised as good practice for debt management. The Council made a commitment to implement the toolkit, and training is currently underway with the aim to be live across Revenues and Benefits by August 2025. We are not aware that any of the other
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			<p>Devon authorities have implemented this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the areas the Revenues and Benefits team are working on is to implement is e-notifications and this will include text messaging and emailing prompts to pay when payments are late or missed to supplement the statutory recovery processes. The aim of this is to help reduce the number of residents falling into arrears which will in turn reduce the number of enforcement cases. <p>I hope that the above provides the reassurance that cases are not automatically referred to an enforcement agent and that there is support in place to help our residents who are struggling to pay and that we are continually exploring additional ways to increase engagement.</p>
3	Cllr Mike Goodman	<p>Question to Portfolio Holder Culture, Sport, Leisure & Tourism/Economy & Assets</p> <p>Given that EDDC's leisure policy actively encourages participation in sport for all age groups, how does the Council justify the proposed increase of up to 50% in football and rugby pitch fees in light of its commitment to residents' health and wellbeing?</p>	<p>Feedback on this was provided in response to Cllr Goodman's question at budget setting, and information added to the fees papers.</p> <p>Sports facilities are essential to supporting physical activity and wider health and wellbeing outcomes. This is reflected in the Council's Leisure Strategy for quality sports facilities and the need to ensure the right sport facilities are provided in the right places and they are well used and managed.</p> <p>The Strategy does not propose actual prices for each facility; this is done as part of the annual fees and charges process in line with the wider policy principles and proposed subsidy levels and concessions policy.</p>

			<p>The rationale is as follows: All our fees were reviewed as part of budget setting and either followed 1) roughly 3% inflation rounded, 2) Increases above inflation where there was a specific rationale, such as with bulky waste where we needed to cover costs of new legislation or services, or 3) Where benchmarking demonstrated we were not at market rate or comparable to neighbouring authorities.</p> <p>For these sports pitch fees no. 3 applies.</p> <p>Benchmarking has shown that other councils do not charge different rates for weekday/weekend matches. Therefore, the pricing for weekday/weekend matches has been aligned.</p> <p>Benchmarking shows that individual matches are priced suitably for the adults and therefore a 3% increase is deemed acceptable to cover increasing maintenance costs. However benchmarking has shown that the pricing for individual youth matches should be decreased to be in-line with other local authorities (Bournemouth Youth - £54.00 per match, Teignbridge Youth - £43.00 per match).</p> <p>Youth pricing has increased by a nominal 3% to cover increasing costs. Adult pricing for both full and half season tickets has increased by 50% more than the proposed youth season ticket costs as a result of this benchmarking. Although other local authorities do not provide an option for season tickets making this impossible to benchmark, when broken down to a per-game price, the proposed pricing is lower than</p>
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			<p>benchmarked areas to provide value for money and an incentive to purchase a full or half season ticket. Per match costs as part of a full season ticket will equate to £29.61 for youth matches and £44.42 for adult matches. Per match costs as part of a half season ticket will equate to £35.61 for youth matches and £53.44 for adult matches. Even with the proposed increase in season ticket pricing for adults this year, EDDC will still be providing excellent value for money compared to other local authorities. Benchmarking per match: Bournemouth £92.50. Lympstone Marine Camp £59. Teignbridge £90. Charges for youth football matches in these areas are in line with our proposed 2025/2026 charges as outlined above.</p> <p>Our staff, servicing and admin costs are all rising, and given wider budget pressures and the need to set a balanced budget it was felt reasonable to make these increases, given are prices are still significantly lower than others.</p> <p>Our Leisure Manager is currently drafting a policy for sports clubs and associations as part of the Playing Pitch Strategy to provide some form of discount if they show that they are providing community based activities.</p> <p>This will require consensus internally before putting in as an action in a new Playing Pitch Strategy action plan being developed for 2026/27 onwards. The PFH Cllr Hookway is supportive of a wider review as part of the strategy is a way forward.</p>
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4	Cllr Mike Goodman	<p>Question to Portfolio Holder Culture, Sport, Leisure & Tourism/Portfolio Holder Economy & Assets</p> <p>At the joint budget meeting, officers were requested to review the proposed increases in pitch fees. Why were no adjustments made when the budget was presented to Council on 26th February, and what was the outcome of the review?</p>	The fees were reviewed, but as set out above felt to be reasonable given the comparison with other providers and the need to balance provision and costs in the context of setting a balanced budget. With CSR and further budget pressures next year, this sort of prudent balancing will become even more necessary.
5	Cllr Mike Goodman	<p>Question to Portfolio Holder Culture, Sport, Leisure & Tourism/Portfolio Holder Economy & Assets</p> <p>Can the Council explain why, despite general annual fee increases of approximately 3%, certain sports pitch fees rose disproportionately—for example, a full-season fee for adult rugby and football increasing from £1,035 to £1,599 and a half-season from £622 to £960?</p>	Please see answer for question 3 which explains, this is in relation to benchmarking per match comparisons.
6	Cllr Mike Goodman	<p>Question to Portfolio Holder Culture, Sport, Leisure & Tourism/Portfolio Holder Economy & Assets</p> <p>In recognition of the value that community sport provides, is the Council willing to commit to revising these fees for the 2025/26 season—specifically to £1,065 for a full season and £640 for a half season?</p>	The fees are felt to be reasonable given the comparison with other providers and the need to balance provision and costs in the context of setting a balanced budget. With CSR and further budget pressures next year, this sort of prudent balancing will become even more necessary, and further increases may be required.
7	Cllr Mike Goodman	<p>Question to Portfolio Holder Sustainable Homes and Communities</p> <p>Given that this Council recognises the importance of providing high-quality housing for its residents and acknowledges the significant challenges East Devon District Council housing has faced in recent years, why has the Stock Condition Survey—originally proposed in 2020 but only</p>	As previously explained at Council on 4th December, Cabinet on 5th March and again on 4th June, and at HRB on multiple occasions, the stock condition survey does not take the form of a single document but rather comprises a substantial dataset—over one million lines of information. This dataset covers our entire housing stock and includes

		<p>completed in October 2025—not yet been made public?</p>	<p>details on the condition of key components, energy performance ratings, projected lifespan of building elements, and other relevant metrics.</p> <p>Given that the surveys were conducted over a two-year period, some properties have undergone works in the interim. As a result, the dataset requires thorough validation and cross-referencing with records of completed works to ensure its accuracy and relevance. This process is essential to ensure that the data accurately reflects the current condition of our housing stock and aligns with officers' local knowledge and asset records.</p> <p>Council officers have been undertaking this complex task alongside their regular duties. In addition, further quality checks have been necessary, including discussions with the contractor regarding their quality assurance procedures and how the data has been compiled and presented.</p> <p>As previously stated, a report on the Stock Condition Survey and an update to the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan are scheduled to be presented to the Housing Review Board on 31st July 2025.</p>
8	Cllr Mike Goodman	<p>Question to Portfolio Holder Sustainable Homes and Communities</p> <p>Can the Council confirm its commitment to transparency by agreeing to publish the results of the Stock Condition Survey as a public record, ensuring the data is anonymised to prevent identification of individual properties?</p>	<p>As stated previously, the stock condition survey is a data file of over one million lines of data which even if redacted would not provide the public with useful information. A report on the findings of the stock condition survey will be published and therefore available to the public as part of the HRB on 31st July 2025.</p>

9	Cllr Jess Bailey	<p>Question to Portfolio Holder for Communications and Democracy</p> <p>1/ what amount has Eddc spent on the technology to make meetings Hybrid, meaning that members of the public and councillors can speak remotely?</p> <p>2/when was this money spent?</p> <p>3/who signed off this expenditure?</p> <p>4/why is it still not operational?</p> <p>5/what date can you commit to being operational? Please can I politely request the answer is not 'very soon' as we have been told 'very soon' for months/years.</p>	<p>1 – 3 A written response will be given.</p> <p>4 – 5 the protocol is drafted but will not be agreed until testing is complete</p> <p>There have been changes in project leads including long periods without a project lead that has stalled the project. Democratic Services are now leading on the project and testing of the hybrid technology has commenced including reviewing how the hybrid element of the system works. Democratic Services have now been issued with additional IT kit to enable operation of the hybrid system and further testing is planned to take place during July and August. The testing work has identified some issues with the system and we are working with our contractor to ensure the hybrid solution is fit for purpose. Once the testing is complete and any issues rectified with our contractor it is proposed that councillor testing will be undertaken before going live. A protocol for access to hybrid meetings has been drafted and once testing is complete will be shared with councillors.</p> <p>The Government recently announced (5 June 2025) that local authorities will be able to hold remote and hybrid meetings (with voting rights) but has not given any indication of a timeframe for introducing legislation to support this. In the meantime, work will continue to test the hybrid option with a view for implementation/going live in October 2025. This will provide</p>

			the opportunity for councillors to access meetings and participate remotely but will not allow members who serve on a committee to be able to vote remotely, until legislation provides.
10	Cllr Ian Barlow	<p>Question to Portfolio Holder for Communications & Democracy</p> <p>Can the PFH explain why it has taken over 6 weeks for new committee seats to be allocated following Cllr Bonetta joining the independent group of councillors. This is surely a simple mathematical calculation that should take 30 minutes to do and an hour at most. By the time this gets to be ratified at council over 5 months will have passed. This should surely be one of the top priorities to make sure that our democratic system is seen to work effectively.</p>	<p>Officers were asked to conduct a review of the political proportionality figures following the last Council meeting, which we duly started. However, we were then advised that there was to be a change to the Independent Group, which means that we need to revise the figures again.</p> <p>Work on these figures is ongoing but unfortunately there has not been sufficient time to complete this work and consult with Group Leaders on the proposed figures in time for this meeting.</p> <p>Whilst urgency of this is acknowledged there is a process that we need to go through and in light of the concerns raised last time, we need to ensure that the work is done thoroughly and with full consultation with the Group Leaders. Officers apologise for the delay and will ensure that figures are circulated to Group Leaders by the end of July 2025.</p> <p>Officers apologise for the delay and will complete the review by the end of July and circulate the figures to Group Leaders in early August 2025.</p>