

Meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

21 July 2022

Response to Recommendations

Budget Monitoring 2022-23 - Quarter 1 Revenue Forecast

The Committee made the following Recommendation:

1. The Committee highlighted the impact of the volatility of the price of fuel on services, providers and the Council budget and recommended the need to be mindful of this going forward when scrutinising related reports.

Response

Recommendation to be actioned by the Scrutiny Team and the Committee on an ongoing basis.

The Committee requested:

2. Information regarding current recruitment issues, vacancy rates and data regarding repeat advertisements for job vacancies.

Officer Response provided:

There are significant challenges recruiting to vacant posts in a variety of services and professional areas across the council. This situation is not unique to local government, I am aware that other public services are facing similar challenges and problems exist in the private sector also. Many labour market reports reference the fact that recruitment is incredibly difficult at this time.

Vacancy rates fluctuate across the council and the situation is fluid. We know that we are advertising over double the number of posts than in 2019/20. In 2019/2020, the council placed 747 adverts, whereas we have already placed 672 this year, projecting 1613 for 2022/23 representing a 116% increase.

There are many examples of low applicants of the required standard and even no applications in some circumstances. There are, however, some examples of good candidates which allow a competitive selection process.

Our HR system does not record repeat advertisements, although this is on the future work programme.

3. The total amount of projected schools' deficit budget for 2022-2023.

Officer Response provided:

The total projected deficits (6 schools) for 2022-23 is currently £248,025.

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Council Performance Against its Commitments for the Year 2021-22

The Committee made the following Recommendations:

4. That the narrative for Welsh Government PAM/015 (PSR002) in Appendix A regarding Disabled Facilities Grants be expanded to clarify that it included all persons/groups.

Officer Response provided:

PAM 015 – DFGs are issued by the local authority to help towards the cost of providing adaptations and facilities to give disabled people better freedom of movement into and around their home and to access essential facilities within it. This measure shows all DFGs delivered for all “persons & groups” during the financial year.

The Committee requested:

5. A written response regarding the lengthy process of compelling property owners to bring their empty properties into reuse to include real case examples and timescales.

Officer Response provided:

Bridgend County Borough Council aims to identify long-term vacant properties and encourage owners and landlords to bring their properties back into use through the provision of advice, support and encouragement. The process is defined within the Empty Property Strategy that has been endorsed by Cabinet and published on the [Council website](#).

Bridgend Council working in partnership with Shared regulatory Services have a nominated “empty property officer” who works part time driving the Councils Empty Property Strategy.

The Empty Property Strategy states that; “The Council and its partners seek to work cooperatively with owners of empty properties to bring their properties back into use. Therefore, regular and effective communication with the owner is paramount, to establish the most appropriate course of action to bring the empty property back into use. “

The process entails sending a series of letters to the owners to encourage them to take positive steps to bring the property back into occupation. Owners are provided with ‘A Property Owners Guide to Empty Homes’ brochure which outlines the options available and the services on offer. Where there is a threat to public health and/ or a lack of cooperation from the owners the Council will consider the use of enforcement action to improve the condition of the empty property and secure its occupation.

It can take a considerable amount of time from receipt of a complaint until a property is brought back into use. Before enforcement action can be taken a full investigation is required prior to service of a notice, to ensure that the action taken is appropriate and

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proportionate. A risk assessment is undertaken of the property to decide where action can be prioritised.

Correct ownership details need to be determined, and the empty property officer has experience of cases where there are outstanding probate issues or delays in information being updated with the Land Registry, sometimes it is necessary to employ a private investigator to locate individuals. Also, there may be more complex legal issues; a current example is a case where the freeholder of a block of flats has ceased to operate and therefore the title has reverted to "The Crown". These issues all add to the time that it takes to undertake enforcement action.

Once the notice is served, the empty property officer can consider works in default, however there are practical difficulties in relation to this due to the availability of contractors as a result of a backlog of work from Covid. There may also be other practical issues for example a case where works commenced, but this led to the discovery of structural issues and therefore the work had to be put on hold whilst supplementary enforcement action was undertaken. This property has now changed hands and the new owners have indicated a willingness to renovate the property.

It is difficult to give a timescale but on average this enforcement work would take approximately 12 months. If a debt is secured against a property, then the service can then look to pursue an enforced sale. This would generally take a further 12 months. Whilst these processes are ongoing, the empty property officer continually attempts to engage with the owners to bring about a resolution. At any time during the process if the owner pays off the debt owed then the process is halted.

Compulsory Purchase would be an appropriate course of action, due to lack of debt for Enforced Sale. However, this requires sufficient financial means and staffing resource to undertake and may again take between 12 months to 2 years.

6. Updated literature regarding Bridgend's promotion of foster care recruitment.

Officer's Response



Foster poster.pdf

We have finalised our Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2022/25.

Once a week fostering post on BCBC twitter page.

BCBC Facebook and Instagram have two posts a month for Bridgend Fostering. We have added three 8x8m Bridgend fostering banners to the outside of the civic building.

Our monthly newsletter to foster carers promotes our £250 to our carers for 'recommend a family/friend'.

We have improved our Fostering information on BCBC website.

We have made Leaflets and posters, and these have started to be handed out and posted on windows.

We have ordered Foster Wales Bridgend lanyards, umbrellas and fleeces for staff to wear when recruiting.

We have a new mascot (Toby the bear).

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Dates have been booked for leaflet handouts with our mascot in our local town centres and supermarkets.

The national campaign is ongoing with an advert on TV and social media updates.

We also have plans going forward for meet and greet sessions to be booked and promoted and we are planning to make a video/reel for social media.