

Question from Chris Caswill

Agenda Item 7 – COVID-19 Financial Update

**To Cllr Philip Whitehead, Leader of the Council and Cabinet for Economic Development, MCI and Communications;
Cllr Pauline Church, Cabinet Member for Finance, Procurement and Commercial Investment: and
Cllr Simon Jacobs, Cabinet Member for Adult Social care, Public Health and Public Protection**

Statement

In paragraphs 52-53 of the COVID finance paper it states that there are 'favourable variances' of £0.360 million in the Public Health budget due to the vacancies being carried in the public health team. It also notes in passing that the Public health budget for this year had anyway been cut.

Question 1:

Presumably one of the vacancies is the unfilled post of Director of Public Health, to which a permanent appointment has not been made for several months. Why has filling this post on a permanent basis not been a top priority in the present circumstances?

Response:

This post is not unfilled. There is a current acting up arrangement which has been in place since 1 June. The process to recruit permanently to this post was delayed due to the focus on the response to COVID 19. Steps to recruit are now being taken.

Question 2:

How many vacancies were being carried in the public health directorate at the time when this report was written?

Response:

The Public Health team currently has 5 vacancies consisting of the following posts:

2 x Consultant posts (which are currently being recruited to)

1 x Specialist Public Protection Nurse (current staff member acting up in this position)
1 x Public Health Specialist
1 x Public Protection Officer

The PH Specialist and Practitioner posts will remain vacant currently to enable the DPH to reshape these posts if necessary for Covid recovery.

There are also some Health Trainer vacancies which are currently being held as they are to support a weight management service which will be being brought in house. The commencement of this service has been delayed and therefore we do not need to fill these posts currently.

Question 3:

How many Environmental Health Officers are in Wiltshire Council posts at this time, and how many were in post in July 2017, July 2018 and July 2019?

Response:

July 2017 – 21 EHOs

July 2018 – 21 EHOs

July 2019 – 22 EHOs

July 2020 – 21 EHOs

Question 4:

How can the continuing vacancies in Public Health staffing be justified? Will you now give an undertaking that all Public Health staff vacancies, including the post of Director, will now be filled as a matter of priority and urgency?

Response:

As outlined in the answer to question 2 the vacant posts are being held while the Public Health structure is reviewed to ensure it can support recovery. Once the review is complete steps to recruit to essential roles in the structure will be taken.

As outlined in the answer to question 1, steps to recruit permanently to the Director of Public Health are now being taken.

Question 5:

What were the budgets set for Public Health by the Council in each of the years 2016/ 17, 2018/19 and 2020/21?

Response:

Budgets for Public Health are net of the Public Health Grant so for completeness of scale of the Public Health activity the budget and the Public Health Grant for the years from 2016/17 are:

2016/17 – Budget £(2.146)m, Grant £18.269m

2017/18 – Budget £(0.340)m, Grant £17.819m

2018/19 – Budget £0.946m, Grant £17.361m

2019/20 – Budget £1.418m, Grant £16.903m

2020/21 – Budget £0.414m, Grant £17.342m

Question 6:

Presumably Public Health staffing resources have now been temporarily supplemented to meet the current crisis. How has that been achieved?

Response:

As answered in question 1 the Director of Public Health post is not unfilled and has been covered internally since the former Director of Public Health Tracy Daszkiewicz left on 31 May 2020. A formal acting up arrangement has been in place since 1 June.

The process to recruit permanently to this post was delayed due to the focus on the response to COVID 19. Steps to recruit are now being taken.

In the response to question 2 the 2 consultant posts were interviewed for last week and work is under way with HR to enable them to start work with the team as soon as possible.

The Specialist Public Protection Nurse post is currently being acted up into.

The remaining vacant posts are being held while the Public Health structure is reviewed to ensure it can support recovery. Once the review is complete steps to recruit to essential roles in the structure will be taken.