

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

11 December 2024

-: Present :-

Councillor Spacagna (Chairman)

Councillors Cowell, Fellows, Foster, Hutchings, Johns, Law, Long and Tolchard (Vice-Chair)

(Also in attendance: Councillors Billings and Tyerman)

36. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Douglas-Dunbar and Cabinet Members: Councillors Bye, David and Jackie Thomas; and Councillor Tranter (who was represented by Councillor Tyerman).

37. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of the Board held on 6 and 14 November 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38. Torbay Food Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Finance – Councillor Tyerman, Director of Public Health – Lincoln Sargeant and Partnership and Inclusion Manager – Laura Hill presented the submitted papers in respect of the Torbay Food Strategy which aims to encourage and support a ‘social movement’ around food in Torbay. The Director of Adult and Community Services – Jo Williams also attended the meeting and responded to questions.

The Strategy had been informed by consultation and engagement with colleagues working in and around food in Torbay including the Torbay Food Partnership and Local Motion Torbay. This centred around six key themes:

- **Food Governance and Strategy** - Taking a strategic and collaborative approach to good food governance and action.
- **Good Food Movement** - Building awareness, active food citizenship and a local good food movement.
- **Healthy Food for All** - Tacking food poverty, diet related ill-health and access to affordable healthy food.

- **Sustainable Food Economy** - Creating a diverse, prosperous and diverse sustainable food economy.
- **Catering and Procurement** - Transforming catering and procurement and revitalizing local and sustainable food supply chains.
- **Food for the Planet** - Tackling the climate and nature emergency through sustainable food and farming and an end to food waste.

Members asked questions in relation to the written response provided in respect of free school meals and how the Council could help parents to take up the offer and be confident that children would not be identified as taking this up; why does Torbay have an opt in system for free school meals when other areas automatically enrol children using Department for Work and Pensions data and people have to opt out; how many children were eligible for free school meals but do not take it up because they don't like school dinners, was the type of food on offer putting children off and did schools offer themed base meals e.g. Chinese to celebrate Chinese New Year (a written response would be provided to this question); were school meal providers and schools themselves part of the Food Partnership; what was the criteria for identifying land to grow food and how do communities nominate a piece of land; the involvement of the Community Partnerships in communication and engagement on the Torbay Food Strategy Action Plan; there were only 20 responses to the consultation, who was consulted and how was it carried out; where would the Action Plan be presented and what was the timescale for producing this; what plans were in place to ensure people have the skills and knowledge to tackle food insecurity; what would success look like and what were the measures; how did the Council join up with people who have excess food produce to ensure that it gets to those who most need it e.g. produce market; how could the Council work with SWISCo to understand why people were throwing food away and how could the Council support initiatives in communities who want to grow fruit and vegetables in their communities; what consultation would be done to grow the Strategy and inform the annual Action Plans; and how does the Council engage with residential care homes and learning disability homes to ensure their residents have access to healthy food.

In response to questions around free school meals, Members were advised that the written response provided the current situation from a Public Health and Children's Services perspective. Further discussions had been held as part of the work on 0-19 Services. It was acknowledged that take up of free school meals was an important issue and continued work was needed with schools and it would take time to make changes. The school meal providers and schools were not part of the Food Partnership but there would be further engagement and development with schools as part of this work.

Members were advised that the growing land project was evolving with a mapping exercise carried out on potential suitable pieces of land. Work would then be done with communities to identify groups that wished to take land on for community growing. Foxhole had been identified as a pilot area, but it could be challenging identifying the right groups to oversee the work and there was a need to learn from others, what works and what does not, so that it could be rolled out further.

The Board noted that the formal public consultation was carried out via the Council's website and there had been a lot of engagement with various groups, including Torbay Food Alliance and Local Motion Torbay, since Covid-19 and following the cost of living crisis. Whilst there was not a lot of public interest all key players associated with food had been involved in the development of the Strategy e.g. Social Supermarkets. The Council was considering how it could potentially reimburse people for taking time to help them engage with the Strategy and Action Plans.

In response to questions about the Action Plan, the Board was advised that there was a commitment for the Action Plan to go to the Cabinet with the Torbay Food Strategy. It was noted that each organisation would have their own Action Plans which would be monitored by the overall Torbay Food Partnership. Consideration needed to be given about how this would be reported on an annual basis to give assurance that actions were being taken towards delivery of the Strategy's vision. There would be measurables included within the Action Plan(s) e.g. sharing surplus food, reduce the levels of food insecurity etc. The long-term vision was aspirational and linked to community growing schemes which would also include projects such as community cooking courses using the grown food to prepare cheap healthy meals. There was opportunity to work with schools through after school clubs with the community doing work around skills and also supporting people with learning disabilities, an example of community work was the Tea Leaf Café in Torre. Some work was being done through the Torbay Food Alliance to secure excess food linking up to the nearest social supermarket but this was not happening on a Torbay wide approach. Examples of success could be more people regularly eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, a reduction in the percentage of people who were on universal credit reporting food insecurity and having to skip meals. It was acknowledged that food insecurity was not just about food poverty and more support was required to help households with their total budgets using a systematic approach that took account of fixed household costs such as housing, energy, transport costs that they had little scope to change. The Strategy included a plan for communication and engagement to grow the membership of the Food Partnership in Torbay and this would include wider community organisations.

Members noted that the Council has good relationships with care homes and learning disability homes and generally the feedback on the quality of the food was positive. Members were encouraged to report any concerns they may have about individual homes to the Director of Adult and Community Services as poor food could be a sign of other issues at the home. Public Health would be carrying out a survey on oral health and would explore including reference to healthy eating as part of the survey. Vulnerable people need to be supported sensitively when trying to encourage them to eat healthily.

Members requested more information on Torbay Local Motion – this can be found on the website at – <https://localmotion.org.uk/torbay>.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Cabinet be recommended to approve the Torbay Food Strategy subject to the following:

1. that the Food Strategy Action Plan be presented the Board and partners involved be invited to contribute;
2. that the Food Strategy Action Plan be presented to Community Partnerships to help reach out to community groups especially around community growing fruit and vegetables;
3. to explore how Director of Public Health can work with Managing Director of SWISCo on food waste and why people are throwing food away and how we can support initiatives in communities who want to grow things in their community;
4. to encourage growers with excess food to join up and help share it with those who are in most need in their community; and
5. to encourage Councillors to reach out to community groups on community growing projects.

39. Update on Operation Brighter Bay and Operation Town Centres

The Board considered the submitted papers which provided an update on the performance of the Operation Brighter Bay and Operation Town Centre projects from 1 April 2024 to 31 October 2024. These projects had been created to improve the attractiveness of Torbay's public spaces, make improvements to highways across Torbay and to address anti-social behaviour and increase feelings of safety. The Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking – Councillor Billings, Cabinet Member for Housing and Finance – Councillor Tyerman, Interim Director of Pride in Place – Anthony Payne, Divisional Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure – Lisa Tuck, Managing Director of SWISCo – Matt Reeks, Director of Adult and Community Services – Jo Williams and Divisional Director Community and Customer Services – Tara Harris attended the meeting for this item and responded to questions.

In respect of Operation Brighter Bay, Members asked questions in relation to, if anything had been done to the grass cutting machinery to enable grass to be cut in the Spring when it was wet; would there be planting around The Strand and had sponsorship of flower beds been explored; there were 7 grass cuts a year, was the Council still doing 'No Mo May'; what progress had been made to the proposed timetable for grass cutting and sweeping for residents; the target for street cleaning in Brixham was ambitious, would it reach 2008 hours by the end of the year; did the additional cleaning include the inner Harbour Brixham and Berry Head; what happens to the grass cuttings at the end of the season; work was concentrated around prestige routes and tourism areas, was the Council trying to bring the whole area up to a standard, including residential areas; what progress had been made to catch up on weed spraying; what was the reason for only 5m of line marking in the Clifton with Maidenway Ward compared to other wards, was there comparison figures for last years line marking; what action was taken for grass cutting in community areas; and was the SWISCo reporting system being used by residents and Councillors and what was the average time to a response.

In response to questions around grass cutting, Members were informed that two large machines and four walk-behind grass cutting machines had been fitted with balloon floatation tyres which were bigger and don't dig in so much which would help with the grass cutting when it was wet. It was noted that 'No Mo May' was not necessarily the best way to improve biodiversity and SWISCo was looking to move to more formal conservation areas e.g. central reservation on Dartmouth Road had a protected species of orchid and edge strips were cut with areas left long and cut and collected at the end of the season. Branding was being developed around conservation and biodiversity and information would also be put out on social media to explain what was being done and why areas were not being cut. A trial was due in early 2025 using the data inputted into the system for an officer and Member portal to provide details of schedules for grass cutting etc against a post code. The Team work on a 4 to 5 week schedule for grass cutting but this can change as a result of poor weather conditions, changes to the schedule were currently not able to be pushed out to the officer and Member portal. Grass cuttings were taken to the green waste recycling farm and were then used as compost. It was noted that the concept of delivering fortnightly grass cutting across the whole of Torbay would be too resource heavy and financially unavailable within the budget. The aim was to make it pleasant for everyone travelling between towns and expanding this where possible e.g. Brownsbridge Road conservation verging, planted wildflowers, central reservation on Riviera Way and roundabouts at the Willows. The final mile prestige covers less than 10% of the total area but required more than 10% of the resources. With 7 cuts a year now proposed, residents should notice an improvement on all verges.

The Board noted that staff had now been employed on a permanent basis, located within Harbour Teams for street cleaning, with the Brixham Team working with the Lengthsmen from Brixham Town Council. They were now working to a settled pattern and would hope to meet their target hours moving forward. The street cleaning was primarily around Brixham Harbour and Brixham Town Centre, with Berry Head being the responsibility of the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust.

It was noted that 900 out of 1900 roads across Torbay had been weed sprayed. Work did not start until early August due to lack of equipment, therefore foot spraying had been utilised. It was more difficult to spray weeds during the Winter due to wind and rain.

Members were advised that the bedding plants for the floral displays at The Strand were starting to be planted today and in the Summer season 12 pyramid planters would also be installed as part of the Capital Project. Sponsorship of floral displays was being explored and developed to ensure a consistent and professional approach across the whole of Torbay to help generate income. This involved developing capacity across the Council working with the Events Team and Commercial Team on highways sponsorship, learning from the success of securing sponsorship for the English Riviera Airshow. There were some legacy sponsorships and some planting had been provided in Paignton and Torquay using social value from some of the Council's suppliers.

It was noted that there was no data on line marking for last year as there had been limited line marking over the past seven years, with the Team starting from scratch

prioritising markings for safety. Line marking was carried out in geographical areas to prevent the need to move large rigs from place to place. Now that most of the safety work had been done, the Team could take a more proactive approach. The markings in the Clifton with Maidenway Ward related to a grid which was likely to have been done by a third party as part of their highways works rather than by SWISCo. The locations for line markings were an officer decision based on safety and staying within a geographical area.

Members were advised that the SWISCo reporting system was regularly used. The timescale for action depended on what was being reported. Fly tipping was usually within 24 hours, graffiti immediately, grass cutting rolled into the next schedule usually 4 to 5 weeks.

In respect of Operation Town Centres, Members raised concern that people feel the anti-social behaviour was from residents of Leonard Stocks and that not being the case and questioned what was being done to get the right messages out; they were also concerned about the impact of vulnerable people being criminalised and dispersal onto neighbouring residential streets; and questioned what was being done to support people leaving prison secure accommodation and working with the Probation Service.

The Board was informed that the impact on early release from prison had not been as significant as expected in Torbay and a dedicated Housing Options prison link officer was working with the Probation Service and Prisons to prevent homelessness.

Members highlighted the need to have suitable permanent accommodation and supported living and enhanced support to help people move out of the Leonard Stocks and the challenges in providing this.

The Council was looking at options for the future of the Leonard Stocks area and would continue to provide positive communications on the impact of the changes since the Council took over ownership with more people staying there for shorter periods of time. There was an opportunity for the Council to work with trusted voices in the community to help facilitate joint working to make improvements around the Castle Circus area.

Members acknowledged the improvements that had been made to the street scene and to help tackle anti-social behaviour, particularly around the Town Centres as a result of the two projects and welcomed the additional funding being put into the budget for 2025/2026 but that more work was needed to address anti-social behaviour and the impact on the community.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Managing Director of SWISCo and Director of Adult and Community Services be requested to advise their Teams of the appreciation of the Overview and Scrutiny Board for their work to deliver Operation Brighter Bay and Operation Town Centres projects;

2. that the Director of Adult and Community Services be requested to improve the communication and engagement around Factory Row to help provide a clear and factual picture of what was being done to support users of Leonard Stocks and address the issues around anti-social behaviour around Castle Circus; and
3. that the Director of Adult and Community Services be requested to include work on Safer Streets and the wider departmental and organisational work as part of the future reports on Operation Town Centres.

Chairman
