

Monday, 30 December 2024

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of **Overview and Scrutiny Board** will be held on

Wednesday, 8 January 2025

commencing at **5.30 pm**

The meeting will be held in the Banking Hall, Castle Circus entrance on the left corner of the Town Hall, Castle Circus, Torquay, TQ1 3DR

Members of the Committee

Councillor Spacagna (Chairman)

Councillor Cowell

Councillor Douglas-Dunbar

Councillor Fellows

Councillor Foster

Councillor Hutchings

Councillor Johns

Councillor Law

Councillor Long

Councillor Tolchard (Vice-Chair)

A Healthy, Happy and Prosperous Torbay

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Governance Support, Town Hall, Castle Circus, Torquay, TQ1 3DR

Email: governance.support@torbay.gov.uk - www.torbay.gov.uk

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD AGENDA

1. **Apologies**
To receive apologies for absence, including notifications of any changes to the membership of the Board.
2. **Minutes** (Pages 5 - 12)
To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 11 December 2024.
3. **Declarations of Interest**
 - a) To receive declarations of non pecuniary interests in respect of items on this agenda

For reference: Having declared their non pecuniary interest members may remain in the meeting and speak and, vote on the matter in question. A completed disclosure of interests form should be returned to the Clerk before the conclusion of the meeting.
 - b) To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests in respect of items on this agenda

For reference: Where a Member has a disclosable pecuniary interest he/she must leave the meeting during consideration of the item. However, the Member may remain in the meeting to make representations, answer questions or give evidence if the public have a right to do so, but having done so the Member must then immediately leave the meeting, may not vote and must not improperly seek to influence the outcome of the matter. A completed disclosure of interests form should be returned to the Clerk before the conclusion of the meeting.

(Please Note: If Members and Officers wish to seek advice on any potential interests they may have, they should contact Governance Support or Legal Services prior to the meeting.)
4. **Urgent Items**
To consider any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent.
5. **Quarterly Housing Audit and Compliance Report** (Pages 13 - 24)
To consider the Quarterly Housing Compliance report which provides oversight of the Council's housing stock to ensure the Council is meeting its landlord responsibilities.
6. **Revenue and Capital Budget 2025/2026 - Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board** (Pages 25 - 36)
 1. To receive an update on the final Local Government Settlement for 2025/2026 and any changes to the proposed draft budget for 2025/2026.
 2. To agree the final report of the Priorities and Resources Review 2025/2026 on the Revenue and Capital Budget for 2025/2026.

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

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Meeting: Overview & Scrutiny **Date:** 9 January 2025

Wards affected: St Marychurch, Tormohun, Roundham with Hyde

Report Title: Quarterly Housing Audit and Compliance Report

When does the decision need to be implemented? Not applicable

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Councillor Alan Tyerman, Cabinet Member for Housing and Finance, alan.tyerman@torbay.gov.uk

Director Contact Details: Anthony Payne, Interim Director of Pride in Place, anthony.payne@torbay.gov.uk

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Housing Audit and Compliance Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) report demonstrates that TorVista Homes are compliant in all areas for their housing stock.
- 1.2 Some areas are a Landlord's legal obligation i.e. gas safety checks, while others are good practice i.e. electrical safety checks.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1 The proposals in this report help us to deliver our vision of a healthy, happy and prosperous Torbay by ensuring that the Council remains focused on delivering its priorities in respect of housing, putting in place mitigations and/or allocating resources as appropriate.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board notes that the former TorVista Homes Audit and Compliance Key Performance Indicators report demonstrates that the Council is compliant in all areas for the former Torvista Homes housing stock;
2. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board notes that the Audit and Compliance Key Performance Indicators will be mirrored and reported for all other housing stock held by Torbay Council;

3. That following consideration of the initial performance reports, future reports be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in line with the normal quarterly budget and performance monitoring reports.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Housing Quarterly Audit and Compliance Report

Supporting Information

4. Introduction

- 4.1 These KPIs were reported to the TorVista Homes Audit & Compliance Committee on a quarterly basis. The KPIs include accident and near misses through to compliance testing, with the KPIs 4 and 5 these are linked to the relevant Housing Policies.
- 4.2 KPI 4 - Repairs and Maintenance Policy. The report ensures that calls volumes are monitored and if they are completed and closed within the relevant timescale for repair categories. It will also highlight any access issues we are having with any tenant. These will be addressed through our Access Policy.
- 4.3 KPI 5 - Compliance Testing. All Gas, Electrical and PAT testing safety certificates, asbestos and lift reports and fire risk assessments are held on Civica for each property. Expiry and review dates are scheduled into this system and weekly reports are generated to this effect.
- 4.4 With the gas safety checks these are scheduled for works to be booked in two months before the expiry date as this allows us to work with tenants where we have access issues and if necessary obtain a Gas Safety Access Injunction Order through Court. There is a robust Gas Policy and Procedure in place together with the relevant letter templates for each stage. To date we have attended Court twice and obtained this type of Injunction.

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TorVista Homes

Audit & Compliance KPI Report

28th November 2024

This report covers the period October 2024

KPI 1 Accidents & Near Misses – (break down reported To RIDDOR, Incidents reported and investigated within 24hrs of notification) – this will include staff, customers and contractors.	No accidents or near misses
KPI 2 Staff absence vs absence lost to TorVista Homes H&S related sickness.	None
KPI 3 TorVista Homes H&S training spend vs total spend on staff training.	None
KPI 4 Helpdesk calls designated urgent and response times.	See page 3
Occupancy and Complaints	See page 4
KPI 5 Compliance Testing	See page 5
KPI 6 Safeguarding Reports – breakdown of reports made to Torbay Council Safeguarding Team.	None

KPI 4 - Helpdesk calls designated urgent and response times

For October 2024 there have been a total of 10 helpdesk calls raised. Of these 10 calls there are no outstanding repairs.

Helpdesk calls for October 2024					
Number of calls	Category	Status	Completed and closed on target	Open and on target	Comments
0	Emergency/ Health & Safety	-	-	-	-
0	Urgent	-	-	-	-
6	Routine	Closed	6	-	-
4	Planned	Closed	3	-	Having issues sourcing a door closer cover

Outstanding calls requiring further works from October 2024		
Number of calls	Category	Comments
0		-

Repair timescales	
Emergency/Health & Safety	Within 24 hours
Urgent	Within 5 days
Routine	Within 20 days
Planned repairs	Within 40 days

Occupancy status

TorVista Homes currently have 32 units which comprises of 18 general needs units and 14 units under the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP).

As of 30th November 2024, 27 TorVista Homes properties were fully occupied. During this last reporting period there are two void properties, one is due to be relet at the beginning of Q3.

The other property is a HMO which remains void while the future use of this property is agreed. This property has not worked under the NSAP project.

Complaints

There have been no complaints this reporting period.

KPI 5 – Compliance Testing

Property code	Communal FRA's / emergency lighting / smoke alarms	Lift report	Water / legionella sampling	Asbestos	Gas safety check	Electrical safety check individual properties	Electrical safety check communal areas	PAT Testing	EPC ratings	Aids and Adaptations
GN1	01/03/2025	Apr-25		06/04/2021		23/05/2026	07/12/2026	23/04/2026	C	
GN2	01/03/2025	Apr-25		06/04/2021		17/08/2028	07/12/2026	23/04/2026	C	
GN3	28/07/2025				18/10/25	05/03/2026	19/05/2025	23/04/2026	C	
GN4	28/07/2025				24/10/25	10/02/2028	10/02/2028	23/04/2026	C	
GN5	28/07/2025				21/08/25	21/08/2028	27/11/2030	23/04/2026	C	Wet room
GN6	01/09/2025				04/11/25	28/10/2029	18/08/2025	23/04/2026	C	
GN7	17/12/2025					30/10/2028	17/04/2028	23/04/2026	C	
GN8	17/12/2025					01/03/2026	17/04/2028	23/04/2026	B	
GN9	17/12/2025					04/03/2027	17/04/2028	23/04/2026	C	
GN10	17/12/2025					03/07/2028	17/04/2028	23/04/2026	C	
GN11	04/10/2025				17/05/25	08/02/2025	02/07/2026	21/05/2025	C	
GN12	17/12/2025					31/10/2028	17/04/2028		C	
GN13	17/12/2025					18/01/2029	17/04/2028		C	
GN14	17/12/2025					18/01/2029	17/04/2028		C	
GN15	17/12/2025					14/12/2028	17/04/2028		C	
GN16	17/12/2025					31/10/2028	17/04/2028		C	
GN17	17/12/2025					01/11/2028	17/04/2028		C	
GN18	17/12/2025					01/11/2028	17/04/2028		C	
GN19	17/12/2025					14/12/2028	17/04/2028		C	
GN20	17/12/2025					02/11/2028	17/04/2028		C	
GN21	24/10/2025					20/07/2028	21/07/2028		C	Level Access Shower
GN22	24/10/2025					20/07/2028	21/07/2028		C	

GN23	24/10/2025					20/07/2028	21/07/2028		C	
GN24	24/10/2025					19/07/2028	21/07/2028		B	
GN25	24/10/2025					20/07/2028	21/07/2028		B	
GN26	24/10/2025					20/07/2028	21/07/2028		B	
GN27	24/10/2025					20/07/2028	21/07/2028		C	
GN28	24/10/2025					20/07/2028	21/07/2028		B	
GN29	24/10/2025					20/07/2028	21/07/2028		C	

Note:

Communal FRA – The management company for the Paignton properties have been contacted and confirmed that the FRA has been reviewed.

Water Sampling/Legionella – this is only carried out where there is a shared water tank.

Asbestos – not needed for post 2000 construction properties.

Gas Safety Check – These are programmed in for the safety checks to start two months prior to the due date to allow for any access issues. If there are any access issues, then TorVista Homes will need to apply to Court for an Injunction to allow access to the property.

Electrical Safety Checks individual properties – It is good practice for these to be carried out every 5 years. However, if a property becomes void then a new safety check will be undertaken.

Electrical safety checks communal areas – All up to date.

PAT Testing – Applicable for Next Steps properties only where white goods have been supplied and will be carried out in-house. This is not a legal requirement just good practice and will be carried out every 4 years with the exception of the HMO which will be on an annual basis.

Communal areas - Contact has been made with all managing agents regarding the frequency of their fire alarm testing. Where there is an issue with the internal communal areas site inspection forms are sent over by email or the managing agent phones through. Any issues will also be picked up under the monthly site visits undertaking by housing.

Fire Risk Assessments/Home Safety Visits - DS Fire partnership agreement has been set up with TVH. Home Safety Visit consent forms are now part of the new lettings sign-up procedure going forward. These visits are free and anything that is highlighted as being needed is supplied free by DS Fire Brigade i.e. flame-retardant bedding, smoke alarms for deaf etc.

Leonard Stocks Centre – All compliance information is stored on Civica, this is a database for all Torbay Council's assets. More detailed information will be reported at the next meeting. Please note that the Leonard Stocks Centre is fully compliant.

Temporary Accommodation – no information has been made available at this time.

Damp and mould

We have a Damp and Mould policy and procedure in place together with a register of where we have or have had issues. At this time there are 6 monthly checks for a room in a HMO, this has remained clear after remedial works were carried out.

There has been an issue with a communal hallway following water ingress through a faulty door seal. The management company are currently undertaking the repair works. The water ingress has just started to cause issues in a tenant's bedroom with some mould growth on the ceiling and floor. This has been treated by professional cleaners and regular contact is maintained with the tenant while these works are being undertaken. Once the works have been completed regular 6 monthly checks will be undertaken in the tenant's home.

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Revenue and Capital Budget 2025/2026 – Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Report to Cabinet to be considered as part of the budget consultation

Background

1. The Cabinet's Draft Revenue and Capital Budget proposals for 2025/2026 were published on 26 November 2024 and available on the Council's website at [Budget for 2025/2026](#). The Panel considered the following documents as part of the consultation process:
 - Revenue Report:
 - Budget Overview;
 - Chief Finance Officer Statement;
 - Fees and Charges;
 - Reserves Statement
 - Financial Sustainability Plans Summary;
 - Capital Report:
 - Capital Strategy;
 - Treasury Management Strategy;
 - Grant Funding Pending Business Case;
 - Updated Capital Investment Plan;
 - Safer Communities Annual Review Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence and Dugs and Alcohol Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board;
 - Multiple Complex Needs Alliance Review Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board; and
 - Key Lines of Enquiry/Questions and Answers
2. The background papers to the Review can be found at:

[Agenda for Priorities and Resources Review Panel 2025/26 on Tuesday, 10 December 2024, 5.30 pm](#)
3. The Priorities and Resources Review Panel 2025/26 was established to scrutinise the proposals and to make comments, observations and recommendations as necessary to the Cabinet's Revenue and Capital Budget proposals for 2025/26. The Review Panel comprised of the Councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Board, as they had developed a strategic and overall knowledge of the Council's revenue and capital budgets through quarterly

monitoring meetings held throughout the year, namely, Councillors Cowell, Douglas-Dunbar, Fellows, Foster, Johns, Law, Long, Spacagna and Tolchard plus Councillor Bryant (Chaired by Councillor Spacagna).

4. The Review Panel met in public on 10 December 2024 and heard evidence from the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Members as well the Chief Executive and Directors. They met on 16 December 2024 in private to agree the key findings and recommendations to the Cabinet heard.

Key Findings

5. The Panel considered the proposals for investment in services, efficiencies and income generation for 2025/2026 and the Capital Budget and the findings from their meetings are set out in this report. The report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board 9 January 2025 and approved unanimously and will now be submitted to the Cabinet as part of the consultation process (to be updated after Board on 9 January 2025).

Revenue Budget

6. Budget Overview

- 6.1 The Panel reviewed all of the Consultation documents for the proposed Revenue and Capital Budget 2025/26. Unlike other Councils who continue to report financial difficulties and the need to reduce services, Torbay Council is in a secure financial position through careful financial management and investment. It was acknowledged that there were no significant changes to services proposed within the draft Budget with a continuation of the Financial Sustainability Plans introduced in 2024/25 to help to ensure that high-cost budget items remain on track, with innovative solutions expanded and delivered to provide the best outcomes within the financial envelope the Council works with. Members noted that the Local Government Finance Settlement figure had not yet been confirmed by Government and that the proposed budget had been prepared during a period of uncertainty. It was anticipated that the Government would confirm the Settlement figure the week commencing 16 December 2024, but in previous years it had been as late as Christmas Eve. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Finance indicated that it was expected that the final Settlement would cover the £400,000 shortfall in the consultation documents as well as allowing for some additional investment. Once received the Chief Finance Officer would provide a written statement to all Councillors setting out the final implications of the funding. This would then be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board alongside this draft Report on 9 January 2025, where they would be able to make amendments to this Report as required.
- 6.2 The proposals within the current budget consultation papers included investing:

- £200,000 in Operation Brighter Bay;
- £200,000 in Operation Town Centres;
- £1.7m (funded through the Adult Social Care Precept) increase in contract fee for Adult Social Care;
- £1.1m to meet service demand and inflationary increases to pay and provider costs for Children's Services;
- £150,000 to meet the pressures of temporary accommodation and preventing homelessness;
- £100,000 in Legal Service Budget;
- £100,000 to recruit additional Planning Enforcement Officers;
- £400,000 for repairs and maintenance;
- £110,000 for inflationary pressures in Insurance and IT Licences;
- £375,000 for inflationary increase to SWISCo contract; and
- £200,000 to reflect the cost of implementing the National Living Wage.

6.3 The proposals would set a Council Tax rate of 2.75% plus the 2% precept for adult social care. With each 1% of Council tax estimated to generate £840,000 of additional income to deliver services.

6.4 From April 2025, the Council would be increasing the amount of Council Tax payable on second homes to 100%. This increase, along with the review of Single Persons Discount and the changes to the Working Age Council Tax Reduction, has been estimated to increase the base budget by £2.596m for 2025/26.

7. Key Lines of Enquiry

7.1 What action was the Cabinet taking to ensure that vital services continue where grant funding had not been confirmed by the Government e.g. Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence; Drugs and Alcohol; Holiday Activities and Food Programme?

Members noted that the Council had analysed the risks regarding time limited grant funding utilised in 2024/25. In the event of such Council administered grant funding not continuing beyond 31 March 2025, continuity of service would be reviewed and, where possible, maintained through budget allocation or the drawdown of reserves.

Members further questioned whether the services would be kept at the same level if additional grant funding was not received from the Government and were advised that it would be the intention for the service output to remain the same so residents did not receive a less beneficial service.

7.2 Does the budget include Community Ward Funds and how much has been allocated to each Ward?

Members were advised that the Community Ward Funds of £2,000 per Councillor was in the base budget and would continue. The Cabinet would

consider if there could be an increase in each Ward allocation upon receipt of the final settlement as this was one of their ambitions.

Members questioned whether unspent monies within the Ward Funds would continue to be rolled over into the next financial year. Members were advised that unspent monies would continue to be rolled over, however, there was an expectation that the annual monies would not be rolled over continually until the end of 4-year period. Members raised concern over the continued difficulties that had been experienced with spending Ward Funds on areas such as play parks and gardens due to other processes e.g. Play Park Review. It was agreed that specific cases would be taken up by the Chief Executive to see if schemes could be progressed.

7.3 Why have the fees for sport increased by 15% instead of the 3.5% applied to the rest of the fees and charges?

Members noted that the draft Fees and Charges document, in some places, detailed either the level required for the Council to achieve full cost recovery and/or how Torbay Council's Fees and Charges compare with similar authorities. In relation to sports fees, it would appear that the Council charged significantly less than others. However, these are officer calculations which should not have been published in the draft fees and charges document. The Cabinet confirmed that the sports related fees for 2025/26 would increase by an average of 3.5%.

Members were concerned that the initial proposed increase had been included within Consultation documents as this had caused some concern to both Members and external organisations but were satisfied that they would be 3.5% in line with other increases. Members questioned the need for cost recovery within sports facilities which did not align with the importance of physical activity to residents for health, mental health, ensuring children keep active and reduce anti-social behaviour. It was highlighted that local Councils had always subsidised sports facilities due to this. Members were advised that the initial proposed increase had been calculated by Officers however it was not the Cabinet's intention for this to be included in the fees and charges. They needed to see what the cost recovery would look like in terms of pounds to understand how much it was being subsidised by. Members requested a written response on the figures that Officers used to arrive at 15%.

7.4 Some Councils have used the additional funding received from Council Tax for empty homes and second homes to fund affordable housing, how much money was raised through this in Torbay and what consideration has the Cabinet given to using this income in the same way for Torbay?

Members were advised that introduction of charging a 100% premium on second homes would commence from 1 April 2025. It was difficult to ascertain the exact amount of additional income this would generate for the Council as, some homeowners could either sell, or re-purpose their properties to avoid the additional tax implication. Based on a mid-level scenario, it had been estimated that an additional £1.4m could be generated. This had been factored into the Council's current Council Tax base calculations for 2025/26. In terms of spending on priority housing needs, the Council allocated £900k

into the homelessness / temporary accommodation budget in 2024/25 with a further £150k proposed in the 2025/26 budget papers. The Council had also recently started to build a new Strategic Housing Service, specifically tasked with delivering a range of interventions, directly and through partners, to meet our growing local needs for good quality social housing. Subject to the confirmation of actual 2025/26 funding in the Settlement, the Cabinet would consider whether there was any more scope / flexibility to assign further resources into supporting affordable housing and priority housing needs, particularly as more of the emerging housing delivery projects come on stream as outlined in the Housing Delivery Plan.

Members were concerned that that Torbay Council had chosen not to allocate the additional income, as other Local Authorities had, to help provide affordable housing and questioned whether there would be a further opportunity for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to receive feedback on this issue once the final settlement figure was received.

Members were advised that all Members would receive a briefing, once the final settlement figure was known and if this figure had helped to close the budget gap of £400k and provide any additional surplus funding.

- 7.5 The report proposed a Council Tax increase of 2.75% instead of the permitted 2.99%. How much additional income would be generated if the Council Tax was set at 2.99%?

Members noted that the Council would generate an extra circa £219k if the Council Tax increase was to be set at the maximum limit to the cap set by Government.

Members raised concern regarding the future base budget if the Council Tax increase was to continue to be set at the lower rate with the full rate costing Bands A to C approximately 7p a week or 17p a week for a higher band. This could result in a cumulative loss of £1m less in the base budget after four years which could have been allocated to improve public services for residents.

- 7.6 Has the Cabinet taken the General Reserves up to 5% as recommended by CIPFA? If not, how much would be realised if Reserves up to 5% were used?

Members were referred to the December 2024 Reserves Statement, the Council aims to set a General Reserve at £7.6m at 31 March 2025 of 5% of the 2025/26 net revenue budget. In addition to this, the Council would aim to retain a Comprehensive Spending Reserve at £3.2m which would continue to be utilised for 'invest to save' initiatives.

Capital Budget

8 Key Lines of Enquiry

- 8.1 What was the governance around additional Government Grants for highways?

Members were informed that the Highways Structural Maintenance block funding forms part of Torbay Council's Local Transport Plan capital funding and is made up from three different Department for Transport (DfT) grant elements (Highways Maintenance Block, Pothole Fund and Incentive Fund).

A Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy and Policy was in place, which was endorsed by Cabinet in 2021, and this sets out the basis for managing the highways asset and the priorities for highway maintenance funding, including any additional funding. There is an Officer decision process in place to confirm the allocation of this funding to the various elements of maintenance of the highway asset, which provides authorisation for SWISCo's Head of Highways to deliver the maintenance programme. This is signed off by the Director of Pride in Place annually. The more specific details of the programme are then delivered in consultation with the Divisional Director Economy, Environment and Infrastructure and the Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking.

Occasionally Torbay Council may be successful in obtaining additional specific grant funding for highways and these may have particular grant conditions applied to them, which may need to be reflected in the governance requirements.

Members questioned how the allocated funding for Highways was being used to rectify the backlog of highways repairs and maintenance and if the £250,000 that was rolled over from 2023/2024 to 2024/2025 had been spent. Members were informed that Officers had previously advised the Cabinet that £68m would be required to rectify the backlog to bring the roads in Torbay to a good standard but this was reliant on Government funding. Any highways funding that was not spent in year would be rolled over and a written response would be provided on the current highways spend for 2024/2025.

Members highlighted that it was not just about the budget it was about the capacity of the Highways Team and Parking Team to implement Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ) and 20 mph zones. The Parking Team were involved in the CPZs and there had been delays due to sudden staffing shortages. The same people in the Highways Team deal with both issues. Members requested a written response on the levels of staff for Highways compared to the last three years.

Members raised concern that sport in Torbay was underinvested, and that budget should be allocated to sport in the Revenue base budget rather than being dependent on funding. Sport in Torbay was not only about infrastructure, it was of benefit to individuals as well for example this year, Abigail Martin who lives in Torbay took part in the Olympics 2024 with support from sport funding. Members highlighted the loss of the free skatepark in Paignton and questioned if there was funding included within the budget for a feasibility of a replacement facility. In response Members were informed that a community group had come together and were looking at various options to bring forward an additional skatepark. Members requested that sport be given a higher priority on the wish list, especially free sports facilities for use by the whole of the community, if there is additional funding in the final Settlement.

- 8.2 What was the governance for spending the additional Government Grant of £2.5m for buses and where will this be spent? What action was being taken to support buses in communities?

Members were informed that Torbay Council have an adopted Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), and hopefully by the time the funding comes online a new Local Transport Plan (LTP), where Officers can deliver the priorities within the available budget in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking.

There were two added complications to be aware of:

- 1) the grant conditions were currently unknown; and
- 2) how does devolution play into this and who are the decision makers in regard to the Local Transport Authority work.

Torbay Council have financially subsidised several services across Torbay having awarded long term 8-year contracts which started in April 2024 to offer stability and confidence on the network but also, demonstrating investment in newer more accessible vehicles.

Officers will be working over the coming months on more promotion of the services and investing in bus stop information.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) 2024 identifies the work still required to deliver the BSIP 2021. BSIP identified priority for Buses to serve the wider community. It goes on to establish ambitions and proposals for 2025 and beyond which focus on intensification of services, improved social necessary transport, alongside the wider investment in the existing network.

Members raised concerns regarding engagement that had happened with all Torbay Council Ward Councillors and the general public in the areas that are underserved by local buses and wanted to understand what opportunities the funding presented. Members were advised that engagement would be held with the community either via the Community Partnerships or with Ward Councillors the Group Leaders being given the opportunity to comment before any decisions were made, however the Council would have to wait until the full grant conditions were known before any processes could begin.

- 8.3 What is the current situation regarding Edginswell Railway Station?

Members noted that Edginswell Station remains a key delivery priority for Torbay Council and our partners, to enable South Devon to maximise the wider investment made in the Devon Metro rail services to provide an improved sustainable transport option for staff, patients and visitors to Torbay Hospital, and business and residents in the local area. The scheme is 'shovel ready' as it has an extant planning permission. The current status is that the Council and our Local MP continue to lobby Government and the Department for Transport to provide funding for Torbay Council to deliver the scheme. However, indications from Government are not leading us to expect that this will be resolved any time soon.

Members questioned what actions the Cabinet had taken to lobby the Government and were advised that meetings were held prior to the General

Election with Ministers. It was made clear that there was a funding gap of £7m that Torbay Council would be required to fund. The local MP for Torbay had agreed to continue to lobby the Government but until the funding gap was found, the scheme cannot progress further. Recent meetings with Ministers had confirmed that additional funding was not available at this time, but efforts would be continued to be made to push forward the scheme and seek the additional funding.

- 8.4 £75,000 was requested to be put into the base budget for 2024/2025 for sport but this has been put in as a one off, what provision has been made to include this in the base for 2025/2026?

Members noted that the response to 2024/25 budget consultation indicated the one-off nature of this funding with the intention of supporting organisations to become more financially sustainable and access external funding. However, the Cabinet would re-consider whether further funding could be allocated into sport upon receipt of the final settlement figure during December 2024.

- 8.5 What action has been taken to invest in our play parks, when will the outcome of the play park review be presented to Overview and Scrutiny and has the review been taken into account when developing the budget proposals for 2025/2026?

Members noted that SWISCo on behalf of Torbay Council were currently collating the feedback that was provided by Children's Services consultation and engagement with play users over the summer months 2024 and were working through the final stages of analysing the 'state of play' across all the play areas owned and managed by the Council. The report will include a view of the cost to replace, repair or reconfigure the play offer on an area by area basis and a report will come through to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in the last quarter of 2024/2025. Such detail was not known in time for the 2025/26 budget proposals.

SWISCo had provided details to Torbay's MP regarding previous Government investment into National Play Strategies and funding to improve Play Areas. Torbay's MP had expressed an interest in understanding whether the Government have any future plans to support Children's Play Provision.

The Panel raised concerns regarding the number of play parks in Torbay with broken equipment and that some Members were using their Community Ward Funds to carry out repairs and purchase replacement equipment, as well as the implications arising from the delay of the Review of Play Parks Report.

It was noted that there were 72 playparks in Torbay and the allocated annual budget for parks was £67,000. Through this budget, only a limited amount of reactive and preventative repairs and maintenance could be carried out and Members highlighted the poor condition of some of the equipment with damaged equipment being removed without being replaced. It was suggested that a reserve should be created for Play Parks but the amount of such a reserve would not be known until the Review had been concluded. Once the Play Park Review had been completed, a more stable funding package could be identified based on need and priority. Members were

requested to refer issues with specific play parks to the Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking who agreed to look at them outside the review of the budget.

8.6 What consideration was there around the expected improvement in Homes England Grant Funding and the impact on meeting our housing needs by building more housing on brownfield sites?

Members were informed that Homes England currently have 17 funds and this was expected to be reduced down to:

- 1) funding through the Affordable Homes Programme; and
- 2) strategic funding routed via Homes England from Government to unlock key sites or pay for enabling infrastructure etc. Torbay Council have always performed well in respect of securing strategic funding, having received large allocations to help unlock a number of the sites within our Regeneration Partnership for example.

The Council was yet to receive clarity on the new funding which would be administered through Homes England. However, the Council would retain close working relationships, dialogue and regular meetings with the department.

Members highlighted the need to build on brownfield sites and the additional costs associated with affordable housing and the requirement for additional Government Funding or Council Reserves to help realise this.

8.7 The Capital Programme only lists projects with business cases, with £0 being allocated for car parks. What action was being taken to invest into car park maintenance and improvements and where was the crossover with the Capital Programme?

Members were advised that the Car Parking Service makes a budgeted contribution to fund emergency works, and one-off improvements to Council owned parking provision. Circa £90k per annum. The current reserve balance stands at £440k, however growing commitments in year are likely to reduce this at year end 2025/26.

The programmed and reactive routine maintenance budget for multi-storey car parks was managed by the Councils asset team and was ring-fenced at £76k per year.

There was currently no provision for general car park investment within the Council's Capital Investment Plan. However, our investment in regeneration projects will include improvements to, and facilitation of, quality car parking – including Station Square in Paignton and Brixham.

Members questioned what action was being taken against anti-social behaviour issues within multi-storey car parks to enable residents to feel confident when parking; when was the lining issues in car parks going to be resolved so as to better mark out parking spaces; what capital investment was being planned for investment in car parks and where would this be allocated from; how were areas prioritised for the refreshment of white lines and could

residential areas be given priority as well as front facing areas; and how much does the consultation process for Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) cost.

Members were advised that SWISCo have the responsibility for multi-story car parks cleaning and further funds had been allocated to increase the cleaning, new lighting had been introduced into some of the public car parks and CCTV had been introduced at the Terrace car park.

Members noted that a number of car parks were included within the Council's planned Regeneration Projects and whilst the Council was aware there are car parks such as Union Square and Victoria Square Car Parks that require maintenance, as these car parks were planned to be demolished as part of the redevelopment, it would not be in the best interests of the Council and the residents of Torbay to spend money on carrying out maintenance on these car parks.

With regards to the white lining, Members noted that external Line Painting was contracted for the larger routes as this was cost effective and SWISCo now have an in-house Line Painting Team with a new truck to carry out the work required to refresh the white lines on the roads within Torbay and this had been enabled through Brighter Bay funding. The Team was currently working on marking lines for road safety measures as instructed by the Head of Highways. The lining refreshment of all car parks would be reviewed in 2026, however when the Team are working in an area that includes car parks that required lining refreshment, this work was carried out at the same time resulting in some car parks receiving attention sooner than others. The aspiration is that by the end of 2024, the Team would have completed most of the highway markings within Torbay that are safety critical, including a lot of the residential areas, then they can move onto other priority areas in 2025.

Members noted that Traffic Regulation Orders were a long process as they required two sets of consultation to take place to allow for the public highway to be altered. The cost to implement a TRO was on average £20k however there were some areas which were more complicated which would incur a higher charge e.g. outside a school.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The Panel reflected and debated the information provided to them, both verbal and written, following which recommendations were formed (as set out below). Members welcomed that due to prudent management of the Revenue Budget over the past few years, there were no specific cuts to services identified within the proposals with focus being given to the high-spend areas via the Financial Sustainability Plans. Overall Members supported the Revenue and Capital Budget 2025/2026 consultation with the awareness that the Local Government Finance Settlement figure had not yet been received and that further information would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 9 January 2025, when they consider this draft report.
- 9.2 Members were mindful of the uncertainty in respect of funding for services such as Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, Drug and Alcohol and Holiday Activities and Food Programme but this was alleviated by the assurance of

the Cabinet that users would not see a reduction in those services and that Reserves would be used if necessary.

9.3 Members felt that more priority should be given within the budget to sport, play parks and affordable housing and that additional funding should be allocated to these areas should the Settlement be more favourable as well as consideration to increasing the amount allocated to the Community Ward Funds.

9.4 The Panel formed the following recommendations to the Cabinet which were approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 9 January 2025. **On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried unanimously.**

10. Recommendations

10.1 That the Cabinet be recommended:

1. that £75,000 Revenue funding be included in the base budget to support sport in 2025/26 and future years;
2. that a Reserve of £500,000 be created for play parks; and
3. that an affordable housing reserve be created using the second homes additional Council Tax funding to help close the gap on affordable housing schemes.

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