

Tuesday, 4 March 2025

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

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

Wednesday, 12 March 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 Long (Chairman)

Councillor Spacagna (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Cowell

Councillor Douglas-Dunbar

Councillor Fellows

Councillor Foster

Councillor Hutchings

Councillor Johns

Councillor Law

Councillor Tolchard

A Healthy, Happy and Prosperous Torbay

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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 3 - 12)
To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 12 February 2025.
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. **Housing Audit and Compliance Framework** (To Follow)
To consider the Quarterly Housing Audit and Compliance report which provides oversight of the Council's housing stock.
6. **Update on Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment Refresh** (Pages 13 - 32)
To consider the submitted report on the latest position regarding the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment Refresh.

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

12 February 2025

-: Present :-

Councillor Spacagna (Chairman)

Councillors Cowell, Douglas-Dunbar, Fellows, Foster, Johns, Law, Barbara Lewis, Long
and Tolchard (Vice-Chair)

(Also in attendance: Councillors Billings, Bye, Chris Lewis, David Thomas,
Jacqueline Thomas and Tyerman)

43. Apologies

It was reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, the membership of the Board had been amended to include Councillor Barbara Lewis in place of Councillor Hutchings for this meeting.

44. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 8 January 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45. Budget Monitoring 2024/2025 - Quarter 3

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Finance, Councillor Tyerman, outlined the submitted Budget Monitoring report for 2024/2025 which set out the quarter 3 position in respect of the Council's Revenue and Capital Budgets. Cabinet Members and Directors also attended the meeting and responded to questions as well as Councillor Tyerman.

The Board asked questions in relation to paragraph 4.8 showed an overspend of £175k on budgets for disabilities – overnight short breaks, what was the reason for overspend in this area; what was driving the overspend in Legal Services; was there a specific area driving Children's Section 17 spend; paragraph 4.23 showed an overspend of £380k in relation to shortfalls for Development Control, planning applications and land charges income as well as an overspend of £135k in Building Control, what was the reason for the reduced levels of fees coming in; paragraph 4.22 showed an overspend of £220k within the Waste Disposal Budget which referred to disposal volumes, what was driving the increase; Torre Abbey was facing budgetary pressures, was it covering the costs for the pitch and putt and when was Torre Abbey expected to start to break even; paragraph 4.24 showed a £275k underspend in

Concessionary fares, what action was being taken to encourage greater use of buses; paragraph 5.1 does not refer to a percentage against the target, how it sat against the target and how it compared to previous years, what were the rates; Paignton Library Heat Decarbonisation was benefiting from Public Sector Decarbonisation Funding and Climate Initiatives Funding which was one off funding, how was this sustainable; what was the current position regarding Edginswell Railway Station; Edginswell Business Park had funding for enabling works, was the Council actively marketing the two business plots; what was the reason for £0 identified for investment in car parks; what progress had been made for the two solar farms; what was the reason for no investment in sports facilities within the Capital Programme; what was the position in implementing the current Playing Pitch Strategy; what was the reason for the delay for the Capital Coastal Defences and Flooding Schemes; there was an underspend in the school capital programme for repairs, could more detail be provided on this and was the Council at risk from any Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Funding (a written response would be provided); why was temporary accommodation showing as a closed project; green waste bins had £409k in the budget that was not expected to be spent during 2024/2025 was the Council no longer providing green waste bins (a written response would be provided).

In response to questions around Legal Services, Members were advised that there had been staffing pressures in Legal Services for a number of years due to pressures in the market, with costs increasing significantly for locum and full time members of staff, which was more than the average staff rises. The Council had been able to fill some vacant posts, through use of market supplements, but there was still a backlog of work which had resulted in some agency staff being retained. The demand for Legal support across the Council remained high due to regeneration and project work, contracts as well as Children's and Adult Services. Members were informed that this had been recognised in the 2025/2026 Budget proposals and agreed that the Board would continue to closely monitor this budget area.

The Board was advised that the Children's Section 17 temporary accommodation had been used where there was a shortage of other suitable placements. There had been an increase in short breaks for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the number of referrals for children with disabilities. This was also used when a family had deemed themselves intentionally homeless.

Members were informed that the fall in Planning income was due to several factors, including a reduction in demand and number of applications coming through the system. The anticipated income levels had been raised in previous years but had not been realised partly due to the economic climate. This had been recognised in the 2025/2026 Budget proposals which would include a £200k adjustment in the target.

Members noted that the Council was reviewing the financial viability of Torre Abbey and Cockington Court, with challenges around income generation year on year. This would involve putting on more events to help them become more financially sustainable. The cost for maintenance of the pitch and putt was being taken by SWISCo as part of their cyclical fee and proposals were in development for future use of the site which would be considered as part of the long-term financial sustainability

model for Torre Abbey. The Board would be monitoring the progress of Torre Abbey as part of its ongoing Work Programme.

In response to questions around waste, Members were advised that the market price for recycling and the volumes for recycling and residual waste fluctuated each month. The changes in the budget were a combination of the amount going into residual waste and the value of the end product for recycled waste.

The Board noted that the collection fund was currently at around 96% and that as in previous years there was a contingency fund. Members requested an update on the forecasted year end collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates.

It was noted that the Council was looking at improved signage and other actions to encourage greater usage of buses which linked to the Bus Service Improvement Plan, Enhanced Bus Partnership and Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority as well as working with colleagues from Devon County Council. The challenge was that funding to support bus infrastructure was not reoccurring and therefore there was a need to avoid creating new routes which would not have ongoing funding. The Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking would be writing to Group Leaders to find out the best way to engage with all Councillors on this matter.

The Board noted that the Paignton Library Decarbonisation Project was fully funded. There had been a slight delay due to issues with the substation and also to ensure it fitted with the wider regeneration of the area.

Members received an update on the Edginswell Railway Station, this included ongoing discussions with the Government and local Member of Parliament and work to ensure that the Planning permission stayed live. It was a priority scheme for development but required additional £7 to £10m funding from the Government in order to progress and the Council was waiting for the next round of funding to open up to apply for this funding.

The Board was updated on the current interest for the sites at Edginswell Business Park. Members acknowledged the importance of letting employment land due to the limited availability of suitable land across Torbay. It was requested that Ward Councillors be kept up to date on this work.

Members noted that there were no proposals in the Capital Plan for investment in car parks. It was acknowledged that there was a large backlog of repairs and maintenance across the whole of the Council's estate including the car parks.

The Board received an update on the ongoing negotiations regarding the solar farms at Nightingale and Brokenbury.

In response to questions around capital investment for sport, Members were advised that focus had been given to the review of play parks. Previously some sports clubs had been given long leases to help them secure investment. It was noted that the Playing Pitch Strategy and Sports Strategies were due to be reviewed in 2025/2026.

It was noted that the delays for the Coastal Defences and Flood Defences were as a result of waiting for confirmation of funding and actual costs of the work. The Council also did not want to start the work in the Summer period and was working with the contractors on the timings for the project, excepting that work would continue into next Summer.

The Board was advised that the temporary accommodation project was closed as this was expenditure for buying new temporary accommodation properties which had been completed with a residual amount left unspent.

Members noted that the school capital programme was ring fenced and any underspend would be rolled forward for use for other school projects. The figures in the report included work to fund additional places in Paignton as well as replacing temporary and out of date accommodation at St Cuthbert Mayne. The Council only had one Private Finance Initiative (PFI) which was the Spires and Homelands and a condition survey was currently being undertaken as the PFI was coming to an end. It was believed that the buildings were in good condition and any issues would be picked up through the condition survey.

Members requested future reports include the following:

- headings on each page of tables to make them easier to follow;
- the description relating to the Waste Disposal budget to be expanded to make it clearer to understand what was covered e.g. recycling and residual waste; and
- a column for the capital projects start date to give an indication of the speed to deliver the project.

Resolved (unanimously):

1. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board notes the Council's forecasted Revenue Outturn position and mitigating action identified in the submitted report;
2. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board notes the updates to the Capital Investment Plan and the revised budget for 2024/25;
3. that the Overview and Scrutiny Board monitors progress of Legal Services Staffing and what the Council has to do to stop relying on locums and know how many vacancies there are and how many agency workers; and
4. to bring an update on capital investment to implement the Playing Pitch Strategy and Sports Strategy to a future meeting of the Board.

46. Performance Report 2024/25 - Quarter 3

The Cabinet Member for Tourism, Culture & Events and Corporate Services, Councillor Jackie Thomas, outlined the submitted performance monitoring report for quarter 3 2025/2026 and responded to questions. Other Cabinet Members and Directors also attended the meeting to respond to questions.

The Board asked questions in relation to BP19 the call centre reported an improvement and had recruited two extra call handlers, how many call handlers do we have and what consideration was given to the programming of communications/mailings e.g. single person discount letters and the impact on capacity of the call centre (a written response would be provided); BP20 the target for Community Fund Spent was 20.6% against a target of 80%, what was the reason for this and was there a dedicated person responsible for co-ordinating the Fund; was there a breakdown of the adult figures of people needing safe housing for escaping domestic abuse particularly LGBTQ+ (a written response would be provided to this question); the report covers data up to December, was there an update on the take up figures for MyBay, including those who have received the free card for Carers (it was noted that take up had been good from Carers and it was also helping the Council to identify people who were Carers, a written response would be provided); there were 648 open enforcement cases compared to a target of 450, the Overview and Scrutiny Board has previously done a deep dive into this area, how confident was the Cabinet that the Council was moving towards the 450 target; what was the reason for BP04 percentage of contacts to Children's Services progressing to early help services in the period being much worse than target; BP47 percentage of weed spraying schedule due achieved during the period was much worse than target, what was the reason for this and had it been impacted by the amount of leaves in the gutters; nine out of thirteen targets for the Planning Department were much worse than target, to what extent was that due to long term sickness and how would this be alleviated; and CP14 percentage of former cared for children who are now aged 19-21 and in employment, education or training was much worse than target, what were the actual numbers and what were the numbers for those who were not former cared for children (a written response would be provided).

In response to questions around the Community Fund, Members were advised that there was a nominated person but part of the delay was due to the delay in applications being submitted, some Councillors waited for the money to be rolled over to a future year to fund larger projects. It was accepted that some delays were due to a lot of the work involving SWISCo staff who were busy on other projects over the Summer with a lot of works being carried out towards the end of the financial year. Members expressed frustration over the amount of time that some of the projects took to be implemented and hoped that the outcome of the play park strategy would assist and also encourage Councillors to use their funds to help draw down match funding for projects in their Wards.

Members received an update on the current staffing position, including the recruitment of additional staff, as well as the action taken by the Enforcement Team to develop new processes to streamline the process and implement the revised Enforcement Policy. It was reported that five cases had been closed that day and there was a real drive and emphasis to close outstanding cases and work towards the set target.

The Board was informed that BP04 was much worse than target due to children not progressing through the Family Hubs in the same way they had previously done. Assurance was given that children were not being missed. An Early Help portal was up and running and instead of referrals coming through the Multi Agency

Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which could stigmatise people, they were self-referring. There had been an issue with the data from the system which was being evaluated to ensure that correct data was being used.

Members were advised that there had previously been an issue with the electric quad bikes but that should have been addressed. There had also been a lot of wet weather and there needed to be a certain amount of dry time for the weed spray to be effective. There was more detritus in the gutters due to insufficient amount of spraying but more should be removed using the new ripping kit. A more detailed written response on BP47 would be provided.

In response to questions around the Planning Service performance, Members were advised that around 60% of all applications that were received had to go back to the applicant as they were not right. There had been training for members of the Planning Team and developers to raise awareness of what was required so that applications could be right first time. The applications were only validated once they were deemed to be complete. Engagement had been carried out with agents, architects and planning consultants to help them understand the information required to be submitted, without the need to advertise revised plans. Members noted that there had been periods of sickness but a new Planning Officer was starting in March and existing temporary staff had their contract extended. Processes had been streamlined but there would always be fluctuations month to month.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Director of Corporate Services be requested to liaise with the Managing Director of SWISCo on how the process for streamlining Community Ward projects can be achieved to enable projects to be implemented sooner and if extra resource is required to achieve this.

47. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

The Leader of the Council, Councillor David Thomas and the Partnership and Inclusion Manager, Laura Hill outlined the submitted report which set out the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy which was currently out to consultation and responded to questions.

The Board asked questions in relation to which groups the consultation had been circulated to; what additional support would be given for young Carers e.g. the MyBay card gives free access to parking, would they be able to get a free bus pass through the scheme; was there a section for Muslim burials within Torbay's Cemeteries; was the workshop being advertised widely and were there any concerns about certain groups causing disruption; who would be on the Torbay Inclusion Partnership Board; and how was the Council trying to reach out to hard to reach communities.

In response to questions, Members were advised that the consultation had been shared with the normal corporate list of anchor institutions, equalities groups, through the Learning Disabilities Team and some other targeted Groups. The Partnership and Inclusion Manager had also reached out and welcomed conversations with groups

that wished to engage further. Paper copies of the consultation were in the libraries and a drop-in session was being held next later this month. Members noted that the workshop session was advertised through Business Newsletter, on staff news and on Linked in and if they were made aware of any concerns over potential attendees to report them to the Partnership and Inclusion Manager.

The Board was advised that there would be various representatives on the Torbay Inclusion Partnership Board and it was agreed that a list of the proposed draft membership would be shared with all Councillors to enable them to provide feedback on the final membership.

The Partnership and Inclusion Manager informed Members that she was trying to engage with hard to reach groups that she was aware of and requested any Councillors who had connections with people in hard to reach groups to let her know so that she can try to engage with them as the Council does not necessarily know who they were.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Cabinet be recommended to approve the draft Inclusion Strategy for Torbay for 2025-2030 subject to the following:

1. to consider how the MyBay benefits can be expanded to help young Carers who do not drive, for example a free bus pass; and
2. to request the Director of Adult Services to liaise with the local cemeteries providers to see how they have considered providing suitable provisions for all religious communities.

48. Rent and Service Charge Policy and proposed changes to Social Housing Rents

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Finance, Councillor Tyerman, outlined the submitted report which set out the Rent and Service Charge Policy and proposed changes to Social Housing Rents, including Temporary Accommodation. The Rent and Service Charge Policy had previously been the responsibility of TorVista Homes with scrutiny carried out by their Board and this responsibility had now transferred to the Council and Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Members asked questions in relation to if the rents were really affordable at 80% of the average of the market rent due to rents being higher in Torbay and if there was any flexibility; last year the rate set an increase of Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1% which equated to 7.7%, what was the proposed increase for 2025/2026; and some of the charges where housing benefit and universal credit were applicable, there was a national campaign over social charges as social tenants in other housing associations/authorities were not able to look at what their landlord was charging, was this the case for Torbay.

In response to questions, Members were advised that the Council would follow how the Government set the rents through the rent formula and would be open and

transparent about the amount of rent for Council owned properties. The increase for this year was 2.7% which was as a result of inflation being at a low level.

Members noted that the technical definition of affordable rent was 20% below market value. There was a lot of affordable rent within the registered provider housing market and the Council was trying to avoid that for Council owned schemes to keep them below the local housing allowance for our properties.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Cabinet be recommended:

1. that the Rent and Service Charge Setting Policy set out at Appendix 1 to the submitted report be approved;
2. that Council on 27 February 2025 be recommended to approve as part of the Revenue Budget Fees and Charges the proposed rent increase for 2025/2026 whereby all Social Housing rents are increased by 2.7% (CPI+1%); and
3. that rent reviews take place on all Service Occupancy properties and those rents be increased up to open market value.

49. Torbay Council Climate Change Action Plan

The Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth, Councillor Chris Lewis, outlined the submitted report which set out the draft Torbay Council Climate Change Action Plan and responded to questions. The Divisional Director of Planning, Housing and Climate Emergency, David Edmondson, the Principal Climate Emergency Officer, Jaqui Warren and the Climate Strategy and Project Officer, Alex Carter also attended the meeting for this item and responded to questions.

Members asked questions in relation to what happened if the Council did not secure the funding to decarbonise Sherwell Valley Primary School; what was the running costs of the heat pumps at Torre Abbey and Torbay Leisure Centre compared to other sources (a written response would be provided); over 2,000 trees had been planted, how many more trees were planned to be planted (a written response would be provided including costs); how was the Council engaging with the public on carbon reduction; how could the Council help businesses to provide biodegradable waste such as cardboard cups and cutlery and ensure that there were suitable bins for recycling; how was carbon neutral work being linked in with the refresh of the Torbay Local Plan to ensure that they complement each other; how embedded were the Council's procurement processes to challenge suppliers to provide evidence to reduce their carbon emissions; there were dual bins in Upton Park for rubbish and recycling but there was an issue with the recycling being contaminated so all the waste was going for disposal, what action had SWISCo taken around education to ensure the bins were used correctly; why was the flood tool developed by Exeter University not being promoted and used (a written response would be provided); and why was there no mention of the two solar farms in the Action Plan.

In response to questions, Members were advised that it was likely that the Council would secure the funding for the decarbonisation of Sherwell Valley Primary School, but that if this was not achieved a robust business case would need to be developed and submitted to the Capital and Growth Board as there were no other suitable grants available. It was noted that the Climate Team had been very successful in securing grants and bringing in new money to support climate change.

Members discussed the Miyawaki forests which involved high density planting the size of tennis courts and their benefits. The Council was working with SWISCo to identify suitable sites for these forests in Torbay.

Members were informed that the Climate Change Partnership, led by the community, was taking the lead on wider public and business engagement in respect of climate change and carbon reduction, through the Greener Way for the Bay Strategy, which had also been signed off by the Place Leadership Board on behalf of key statutory partners. Torbay Communities was working through the Imagine This Group who work with young people and subject to funding would be looking at the natural environment and engaging with their families, which could then be rolled out to other areas.

Members acknowledged that the Torbay Council Climate Change Action Plan set out the actions that Torbay Council would be taking forward, for example, introducing food waste caddies across all Council buildings.

The Climate Team was working closely with the Local Plan Team to ensure that the policies aligned with one another. There was potential if agreement cannot be reached on the numbers of housing that Supplementary Planning documents could be created around affordable housing and climate change.

In response to questions around procurement, Members were informed that information was included within the current procurement templates around environmental policy, but the questions depended on the level of contract being procured. The Action Plan included more work around collecting actual data on carbon footprints etc. and working with key contractors to embed the process. Work was being undertaken with the Procurement Team to ensure that carbon emissions were being captured by contractors so that the Council understands them up front and what they were doing to tackle emissions. The Team was also working with the Council's Regeneration Partners.

The two solar farms were referenced in the Greener Way for the Bay document, which was leading and delivering a lot of actions with partners and the community. It was felt that duplication between the two Plans should be avoided.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Cabinet be recommended:

1. to approve the Torbay Council Climate Change Action Plan 2024-2026 as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report; and

2. to request SWISCo to raise awareness of recycling in public bins, to reduce the risk of contamination of the recycled waste and enable it to be processed effectively.

Chairman

Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Board

Date: 12 March 2025

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Update on Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment Refresh

When does the decision need to be implemented? N/A

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Cllr Hayley Tranter, Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services, Public Health and Inequalities. Email: hayley.tranter@torbay.gov.uk

Director Contact Details: Joanna Williams, Director of Adults and Community Services Email: joanna.williams@torbay.gov.uk

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Board with an update on the refresh of the domestic abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment.

2. Background

2.1. Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, enacted in October 2021, places a duty upon Torbay Council as a Tier 1 Authority to undertake a Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment to examine the needs of adults and children placed in designated safe accommodation as a result of fleeing domestic abuse.

2.2. This assessment should be refreshed annually; however we waited until we could gather a full two years of data before undertaking the refresh, which was completed in September 2024. A full version of the Needs Assessment is available on request, a summary version is attached at Appendix 1.

2.3. The process to undertake the refreshed needs assessment included:

- a) Identification of the key data in the original assessment and updating the data where it was available
- b) A survey of people staying in safe accommodation to gather their views on their experiences
- c) Checking progress against the Safe Accommodation Strategy Action Plan
- d) Identifying new or continuing gaps.

- 2.4. It should be noted that reliable Devon and Cornwall Police data was not available during this process due to the implementation of the new IT system. This also meant that crime data specific to Devon and Cornwall that would have been used was also not available for the period under review (2022 to 2024) such as the Crime Survey for England and Wales. However national data has been used where possible to show general trends for comparison with Torbay.

3. Findings

3.1 Ongoing priorities from previous Safe Accommodation Plan:

- a) Pathways into safe accommodation and support - work on this is held within the Growth in Action Alliance comprising the domestic abuse service, homeless hostel and adult treatment services. (Growth in Action is the new name of the Multiple Complex Needs Alliance).
- b) Improving access for people with mobility needs, older people, minoritised communities and those with intersectional needs. There has however been some progress in this regard for people with learning difficulties, older people and those from the LGBT+ community.
- c) Achieving move on in the current local housing market and the impact on length of time people stay in safe accommodation
- d) Cross border referral pathways and processes.

3.2 New gaps identified:

- a) The need for more single person safe accommodation units due to demand
- b) Addressing the specific lack of representation in safe accommodation of groups with a high prevalence in the local population particularly older people, men, and young adults under 25, people with learning difficulties or other neuro-diverse conditions.
- c) Limited wheelchair accessible accommodation
- d) Understanding of economic abuse
- e) The use of time limited grant funding from sources other than the Safe Accommodation New Burdens Grant to support some identified needs.
- f) An appropriate and sustainable emotional therapeutic offer for children and adults in safe accommodation.

4. Recommendations from the Needs Assessment

- 4.1 The recommendations resulting from the refreshed Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment are as follows:
- a) Increase safe accommodation provision for single people and initiatives to improve move on;
 - b) Raise awareness of domestic abuse among and improve access to safe accommodation by older people;
 - c) Provide the right offers of emotional support for people living in safe accommodation, particularly their children. Exploring broader co-commissioning opportunities with the South West Peninsula commissioners in this regard may well provide a way forward once needs are better understood;
 - d) Promote the safe accommodation service as a non-gendered service offer in targeted locations;
 - e) Replace a 2 bedroom safe house with a 2 bedroom wheelchair adapted safe house;
 - f) Explore peoples' experiences of accessing Alliance services to improve pathways;
 - g) Continue collaboration and co-commissioning with SW Peninsula colleagues and ensuring visibility in the proposed Collaboration Forums as required by the emerging Victims and Prisoners Bill (Duty to Collaborate); and
 - h) There should be more effort to proactively identify and address domestic abuse at an earlier stage, providing support before the need to access safe accommodation. The Co-ordinated Community Response¹, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and Whole Housing Approach² are models that Torbay should consider;
- 4.2 The recommendations have been incorporated into an action plan which is attached at Appendix 2 and the Board is recommended to consider the action plan and make recommendations to the Cabinet.

5. Supporting Documents

- 5.1 Summary Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment- Appendix 1
- 5.2 Updated Safe Accommodation Action Plan - Appendix 2

¹ <https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/what-is-ccr>

² <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/innovations-in-practice/whole-housing-approach/>

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government provides funding for the Authority to meet the needs identified in the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment. From April 2022 to April 2024 this came via a New Burdens grant however the funding for April 2025 to March 2026 and thereafter will be included in the annual Local Government Finance Settlement.
- 6.2 The funding for 2025/26 totals nearly £400K. The funding is set out as a separate line in the settlement and the Chief Executive is expected to sign a Memorandum of Understanding confirming that the funding will be used for the purpose of meeting the needs identified in the needs assessment.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act and groups with increased vulnerability	Data and insight	Equality considerations (including any adverse impacts)	Mitigation activities	Responsible department and timeframe for implementing mitigation activities
Age Page 17	<p>18 per cent of Torbay residents are under 18 years old.</p> <p>55 per cent of Torbay residents are aged between 18 to 64 years old.</p> <p>27 per cent of Torbay residents are aged 65 and older.</p>	<p>The needs assessment has highlighted that older people are under-represented in domestic abuse services.</p>	<p>Older People’s Charter and Age Friendly pledge</p>	<p>See action plan</p>
Carers	<p>At the time of the 2021 census there were 14,900 unpaid carers in Torbay. 5,185 of these provided 50 hours or more of care.</p>	<p>There is no differential impact</p>		
Disability	<p>In the 2021 Census, 23.8% of Torbay residents answered that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot by</p>	<p>The needs assessment has highlighted that more family sized adapted safe accommodation is needed</p>	<p>Re-provide one adapted family safe house</p>	<p>See action plan</p>

	a physical or mental health condition or illness.			
Gender reassignment	In the 2021 Census, 0.4% of Torbay's community answered that their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth. This proportion is similar to the Southwest and is lower than England.	There is no differential impact.	LGBT+ support in place	
Marriage and civil partnership	Of those Torbay residents aged 16 and over at the time of 2021 Census, 44.2% of people were married or in a registered civil partnership.	There is no differential impact		
Pregnancy and maternity	Over the period 2010 to 2021, the rate of live births (as a proportion of females aged 15 to 44) has been slightly but significantly higher in Torbay (average of 63.7 per 1,000) than England (60.2) and the South West (58.4). There has been a notable fall in the numbers of live births since the middle of the last decade across all geographical areas.	There is no differential impact		

Race	In the 2021 Census, 96.1% of Torbay residents described their ethnicity as white. This is a higher proportion than the South West and England. Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals are more likely to live in areas of Torbay classified as being amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.	The needs assessment has highlighted that people from minoritised communities are under-represented in safe accommodation	Joint working with Peninsula commissioners and VCS by and for groups	See action plan
Religion and belief	64.8% of Torbay residents who stated that they have a religion in the 2021 census.	There is no differential impact		
Sex	51.3% of Torbay's population are female and 48.7% are male	The needs assessment has highlighted that males are under-represented in domestic abuse safe accommodation	Targeted promotion and one bed provision	See action plan
Sexual orientation	In the 2021 Census, 3.4% of those in Torbay aged over 16 identified their sexuality as either Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or, used another term to describe their sexual orientation.	There is no differential impact	LGBT+ support in place	
Armed Forces Community	In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. In Torbay,	There is no differential impact		

	5.9 per cent of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces.			
Additional considerations				
Socio-economic impacts (Including impacts on child poverty and deprivation)		The needs assessment identifies the need for more resource to move on into long term accommodation		
Public Health impacts (Including impacts on the general health of the population of Torbay)		The needs assessment identifies the need for therapeutic support for victims and their children	Explore options	See action plan
Human Rights impacts		There is no differential impact		
Child Friendly	Torbay Council is a Child Friendly Council, and all staff and Councillors are Corporate Parents and have a responsibility towards cared for and care experienced children and young people.	The needs assessment identifies the need for therapeutic support for children and young people in safe accommodation as victims of domestic abuse.	Explore options	See action plan

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Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment Refresh 2024

Summary Document

Introduction

Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, enacted in October 2021, places a duty upon Torbay Council as a Tier 1 Authority to undertake a Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment to examine the needs of adults and children placed in designated safe accommodation as a result of fleeing domestic abuse.

The full Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment was completed in 2021/22. The first refresh was due in 2023 however we have delayed the completion of the updated needs assessment so that we could have 2 full years of data since the inception of Safe Accommodation Duty.

This document is the summary version outlining the key findings from the refreshed Needs Assessment and an updated action plan to address those needs.

Progress Against the Safe Accommodation Strategy Action Plan 2021-24

What has been achieved



It is important to note that the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment has informed how other grant funding in addition to the Domestic Abuse Act New Burdens monies has been used to respond to the gaps identified.

Ongoing Priorities

- Improving pathways into and between services including voluntary sector – this is part of the Growth in Action Alliance service development workstream which involves co-production with staff and people using services
- Improving safe accommodation provision for people with mobility needs
- Improving access to safe accommodation for people from minoritised communities and those with multiple needs
- Balancing length of stay in safe accommodation against challenges of moving on to an affordable long term home in the current local housing market
- Cross border referral pathways and processes

Key data from 2024 Needs Assessment

- **91.7% of people in safe accommodation are female**, and in the 21 to 44 years age range. This is supported by the national prevalence data and Devon and Cornwall Police data.
- Over the last two years there has been a small increase in **females over the age of 55** placed in safe accommodation, however the numbers are not representative of the local population (35% of females are over 60 years of age)
- **Low number of people with learning disabilities, Autism, Aspergers or other neuro-diverse conditions**, when ONS 2022 data shows that among women with disabilities, women with learning and understanding impairments are even more likely than women with physical impairments to experience these forms of abuse
- Small increase in referrals from the LGBTQ+ community, possibly connected to the Safer Rainbow LGBTQ+ IDVA service provided across Devon by the Intercom Trust funded by the National IDVA/ISVA Fund.
- **Increase in referrals and numbers placed during 2023/24 and increase in those on additional benefits**, possibly a sign of the impact of the cost of living crisis.
- Similarly, there is an **increase in people needing financial advice and support**
- **Increase in numbers presenting with poor mental health**
- **Low numbers of people with disabilities** although ONS data in 2022 shows they are three times more likely to experience domestic abuse
- **The number of children entering safe accommodation increased by 57% in 2023/24**
- **No children have been denied** access to safe accommodation

Headline Findings

Domestic abuse **was the third main reason** for loss of accommodation in 2022/23.

Increase in supported **safe accommodation units from 15 to 23** properties across Torbay

Improved pathways between Housing Options and Safe Accommodation Service

Virtual Safe Accommodation Panel is in place acting as a conduit for information sharing, unblocking obstacles and problem solving

Flexible Funding Pot in place to support access and move on

Majority of people leaving safe accommodation move on to long term accommodation

More single people fleeing DVA are in temporary accommodation than accessing safe accommodation

Move on is challenging generally but especially for single person households

Challenges with move on due to the local housing market means some people stay longer in safe accommodation

There is a lack of referrals from Adult Social Care

Better understanding of the needs of some minoritised groups – LGBT+ and people with learning difficulties or neuro-diverse conditions to inform future commissioning

Co-produced the development of a Learning Disabilities Toolkit and training to improve service responses and access to safe accommodation for people with learning difficulties and neuro-diversities across the SW Peninsula

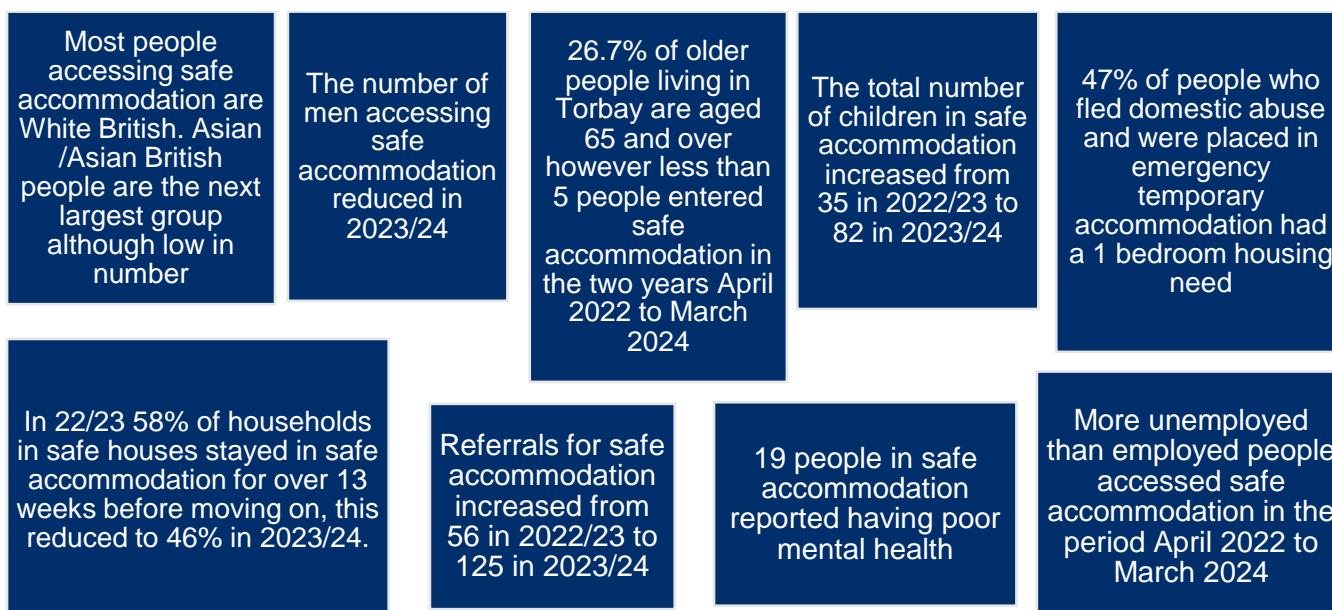
Peninsula collaboration and joint commissioning activity to meet shared gaps

Growth in Action Alliance in place comprising domestic abuse, adult treatment services and the homeless hostel that will facilitate improved identification and support for people with intersectional needs

Co production and trauma informed practice is central in the new Growth in Action service

New specialist domestic abuse Housing Officers planned during 2024

Improved monitoring of protected characteristics and socio-economic factors



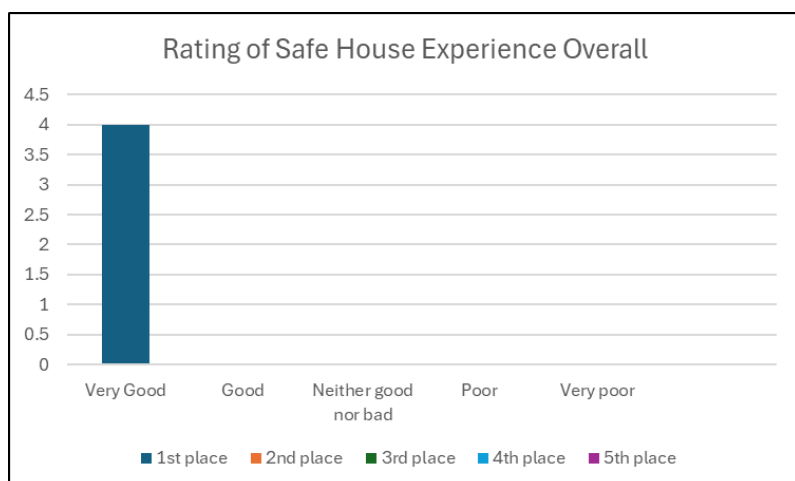
Gaps:

- Safe accommodation for single person households
- Some specific groups with a high prevalence in the local population are not accessing safe accommodation – particularly older people, young adults under 25, men, people with learning difficulties and neuro diverse conditions, LGBT+, people with care needs and people with complex needs
- Therapeutic Emotional support for both adults and children at a time that suits them
- Lack of wheelchair accessible units
- Improved understanding of economic abuse
- Alternative sources of funding (time limited grant funding) have been used to put in place support for some identified needs – for example LGBT+, women with complex lives.

What people told us

A survey of safe house residents took place in February 2024. They were asked about their experiences in safe accommodation and also what they would find most useful and helpful during their stay in safe accommodation, and in responding to the trauma they had experienced.

A small number (23%) responded however expressed satisfaction with their safe house experience overall.



When asked the best thing about moving into a safe house- responders mentioned safety, reduced anxiety, children able to be themselves, freedom from abuse.

When asked the worst thing about moving into a safe house – responders mentioned leaving pets, feeling isolated from family and friends, confronting their abusive experiences and realising it was not their fault.

When asked what could improve staying in a safe house people responded that they would like more opportunities to meet others and make friends, to reduce social isolation.

Conclusions

Whilst good progress has been made to improve capacity and provision for people needing support in safe accommodation, there are some continuing gaps that were identified in the original needs assessment that remain unaddressed, as well as new challenges emerging. Changes to the local housing market resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the availability of affordable private rented accommodation, in an area where this sector was already a key part of the solution to homelessness. This in turn is leading

to longer stays in safe accommodation for some people. For single people, if they are lucky enough to access a safe house (and even if they do not), they will wait a protracted length of time to move on.

The economic climate and cost of living crisis is also playing a role in the affordability of long term housing solutions, and this could be a contributory factor in the reduced numbers of people fleeing DVA accessing safe and emergency accommodation in the latter part of 2023 and into 2024.

The budget for the New Burdens duty ends in March 2025. Although not examined here, the amount provided for safe accommodation support is just about adequate however the needs identified exceed the funding available to provide an effective therapeutic offer that can be commissioned on a sustainable basis.

Torbay must continue to work collaboratively with its local statutory partner agencies and neighbouring Peninsula Authorities to use a combination of different funding routes to supplement Domestic Abuse Duty monies; thus enabling delivery of service responses to the gaps identified in the Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment. There is a risk however when most of the funding currently in use is short term time limited grant monies, and there is uncertainty about future funding in the current economic and new political climate that is creating a “cliff edge” of support. This is not unique to the domestic abuse sector.

Recommendations for future focus:

1. Increase safe accommodation provision for single people and initiatives to improve move on
2. Raise awareness of domestic abuse among and improve access to safe accommodation by older people
3. Provide the right offers of emotional support for people living in safe accommodation, particularly their children. Exploring broader co-commissioning opportunities with the South West Peninsula commissioners in this regard may well provide a way forward once needs are better understood.
4. Promote the safe accommodation service as a non-gendered service offer in targeted locations
5. Replace a 2 bedroom safe house with a 2 bedroom wheelchair adapted safe house
6. Explore peoples’ experiences of accessing Alliance services to improve pathways
7. Continue collaboration and co-commissioning with SW Peninsula colleagues and ensuring visibility in the proposed Collaboration Forums as required by the emerging Victims and Prisoners Bill (Duty to Collaborate).
8. There should be more effort to proactively identify and address domestic abuse at an earlier stage, providing support before the need to access safe accommodation. The Co-ordinated Community Response¹, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and Whole Housing Approach² are models that Torbay should consider.

¹ <https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/what-is-ccr>

² <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/innovations-in-practice/whole-housing-approach/>

Safe Accommodation Action Plan 2024 to 2026

		Target Date
1	Reduce Barriers and Improve Access to Safe Accommodation	
	Establish specific DA practitioners in Housing Options	October 2024
	Continue working with Peninsula partners to address barriers to accessing safe accommodation for minoritised groups and communities including:	
	a) Promote the Learning Disability toolkit	November 2024
	b) Launch of Older Peoples Charter	November 2024
	c) Promote Safer Rainbow and seek funding for continuation	March 2025
	d) Explore opportunities for co-commissioning offers for black and minoritised ethnic and other minoritised groups including supporting VCS providers with funding bids	In progress
	Continuation funding for Complex Lives Navigators	March 2025
2	Provide Safe Accommodation to Meet Needs	
	Source 1 x family size wheelchair adapted safe house through additional unit or re-provision of a current unit.	March 2025
	Source an additional 2 units of one bedroom safe accommodation on a phased approach	March to June 2025
3	Support with Trauma and Emotional Wellbeing	
	Map existing landscape for emotional and therapeutic support for adults and children	March 2025
	Explore opportunities to add to or enhance existing provision including grass roots support provided by VCS	September 2025
	Explore co-commissioning a Peninsula wide therapeutic offer	March 2026
	Domestic Abuse professionals and practitioners to receive Trauma Stabilisation training	March 2026
	Explore and embed initiatives to address domestic abuse at an earlier stage to avoid the need to enter safe accommodation	March 2026
	Delivery of Economic Abuse training to key agencies and staff	March 2025
4	Listen and Respond to Lived Experience	
	Work alongside people with lived experience to continue to understand their experiences and develop a lived experience network to inform, advise and influence decision making of the Partnership Board.	September 2025

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		Target Date	Status
1	Reduce Barriers and Improve Access to Safe Accommodation		
	Establish specific DA practitioners in Housing Options	October 2024	Posts established. Recruitment ongoing as one appointee left and one unfilled.
	Continue working with Peninsula partners to address barriers to accessing safe accommodation for minoritised groups and communities including:		
	a) Promote the Learning Disability toolkit	November 2024	Promotion delayed as toolkit needed to be designed for ease of use- due Spring 2025
	b) Launch of Older Peoples Charter	November 2024	Older People's Charter & Age Friendly Pledge launch scheduled for April 2025.
	c) Promote Safer Rainbow and seek funding for continuation	March 2025	Training sessions and awareness raising completed October to December 2024. Further funding until March 2026 confirmed by Ministry of Justice.
	d) Explore opportunities for co-commissioning offers for black and minoritised ethnic and other minoritised groups including supporting VCS providers with funding bids	In progress	Exploring potential Peninsula-wide Target Population commissioning strategy Targeted promotion of service to males
	Continuation funding for Complex Lives Navigators	March 2025	Funding continuation confirmed until March 2026 and possibly beyond. Evaluation to be undertaken Spring 2025.
2	Provide Safe Accommodation to Meet Needs		
	Source 1 x family size wheelchair adapted safe house through additional unit or re-provision of a current unit.	March 2025	Negotiations with domestic abuse accommodation provider ongoing

	Source an additional 2 units of one bedroom safe accommodation on a phased approach	March to June 2025	Negotiations with domestic abuse accommodation provider ongoing
3	Support with Trauma and Emotional Wellbeing		
	Map existing landscape for emotional and therapeutic support for adults and children	March 2025	Working with Children's Services to identify support options. Proposal to DASVEG for evaluation of "what works" for CYP in safe accommodation in other LA areas.
	Explore opportunities to add to or enhance existing provision including grass roots support provided by VCS	September 2025	Budget proposals to DASVEG March 2025 – ensure continuation of current provision
	Explore co-commissioning a Peninsula wide therapeutic offer	March 2026	Not started. May become a local trauma stabilisation offer.
Page 32	Domestic Abuse professionals and practitioners to receive Trauma Stabilisation training	March 2026	Ongoing
	Explore and embed initiatives to address domestic abuse at an earlier stage to avoid the need to enter safe accommodation	March 2026	Proposals to DASVEG March 2025
	Delivery of Economic Abuse training to key agencies and staff	March 2025	Scheduled for March and April 2025
4	Listen and Respond to Lived Experience		
	Work alongside people with lived experience to continue to understand their experiences and develop a lived experience network to inform, advise and influence decision making of the Partnership Board.	September 2025	Peer Researchers in place October 2024. Lived experience engagement work funded within VCS. Proposal to DASVEG for continuation funding for Peer researchers.

Note – DASVEG is the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group – the local multi-agency partnership board reporting into the Community Safety Partnership.