

## **Meeting of the Council, Thursday, 12 September 2024**

### **Members' Questions Under Standing Order A12**

A member may only submit three questions for consideration at each Council Meeting. Each member will present their first question in turn, when all the first questions have been dealt with the second and third questions may be asked in turn. The time for member's questions will be limited to a total of 30 minutes.

#### **First Round**

##### **Question 1**

##### **Councillor Long to the Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services, Public Health and Inequalities (Councillor Tranter)**

What impact has the 'Right Care, Right Person' model had on services provided by Torbay Council (e.g. Social Services, Mental Health Services or any other services), and what lessons have been learnt or changes made to the model since its introduction?

##### **Answer to Question 1 provided by Councillor Tranter**

Devon and Cornwall Police have worked in partnership with all agencies likely to be impacted by the proposed changes. They have hosted multi agency Peninsula wide meetings including tactical, Strategic and scrutiny panels.

To date there has been minimal impact in terms of the police response to children or adults deemed to be vulnerable, resolving at source without the need for escalation.

Children's Social Care has largely sat outside of the RCRP initiative as the Police utilises the Children's Act 1989 as its legislative basis for intervention with the premise that decision-making is reached via the concept of significant harm.

- Equally adults social care has not highlighted any significant changes in partnership working especially as ASC already have detailed protocols in place prior to calling on Police resources to help.
- Scrutiny Panels to audit outcomes and challenges arising as a result of the implementation of RCRP have been well attended by Torbay representatives across Children's services, Adult Social Care, Mental Health Social Care and TDSFT Emergency Department representatives.
- There have been no concerns reported from Community Safety Teams.

## **Question 2**

### **Councillor George Darling to the Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth (Councillor Chris Lewis)**

During a failure at the Ilsham Valley Sewage Pumping Station in April, there was a continuous discharge recorded for almost 70 hours.

In a letter from South West Water they state ‘..failures occurred during times of heavy rainfall, and as Ilsham Valley SPS has a storm overflow there is a permit provision for the overflow to be used during rainfall, subject to specific conditions. The discharges recorded by our Event Duration Monitors (“EDMs”) that occurred during the period of failures at the SPS enclosed with this letter do not distinguish between spills that occurred under ‘storm overflow’ provisions and those during the failures.’

Whilst South West Water state that this failure happened at a time of heavy rainfall, weather records suggest that there was only 2 hours of rain in the days preceding the failure.

What action is the council taking to hold South West Water to account to reduce the frequency of discharges like this, monitor, and improve water quality for residents using our beaches and sea.

### **Answer to Question 2 provided by Councillor Chris Lewis**

The monitoring of the sewage network is not the responsibility of the Council. The Harbour Authority receive alerts after significant rainfall, as this can impact upon the quality of bathing water. We respond to these alerts by placing notices at our main beaches to inform the public of a potential reduction of bathing water quality. All bathing beaches are tested by the Environment Agency throughout the season. In relation to the Ilsham Pumping Station failure, we were directly informed of this by South West Water. South West Water are due to attend a future meeting of Overview and Scrutiny.

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## **Second Round**

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## **Question 3**

### **Councillor Long to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Finance (Councillor Tyerman)**

A number of Councillors have received casework from residents regarding the review of the Single Person Discount for Council Tax. Issues raised include the inability to contact the Council on the phone provided; the short timetable to respond over the holiday season when many residents might be away; and the threatening

tone of the correspondence received from the Council. What lessons have the Council learnt via this process?

### **Answer to Question 3 provided by Councillor Tyerman**

The Council commenced its review of Single Person Discount, (SPD), in mid-June 2024, sending out approximately 1,000 letters per week. We currently have more than 26,000 residents that claim SPD accumulating a total benefit, (foregone income to the Council), of £10m. The payment of these benefits has not been formally reviewed by the Council for 5 years and we anticipate that there will be a proportion of recipients who are no longer entitled to the discount. As at the end of August we have issued 13,000 letters and have only received one formal complaint, there have been three service enquiries from members of the public and three enquiries from Councillors. Concerns have mainly focused around the accessibility of the designated help line.

Given the financial sums involved, the content of the letter needs to provide clarity to ensure that residents understand their obligations and responsibilities. We have however reviewed the letter and made a couple of minor amendments to improve clarity – specifically around financial penalties only being considered in the event of an individual failing to notify the Council of a change in circumstances. We will continue to review the effectiveness of the designated resident helpline and would encourage Councillors to raise relevant concerns with us so that we can continue to improve the service.

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## **Third Round**

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### **Question 4**

#### **Councillor Long to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Councillor Bye)**

The Council has received an offer of Grant funding from the Government's Youth Investment Fund. This grant is designed to improve the offer to young people in Torquay (which the Council acknowledges there is a shortfall in provision). The grant funding was due be spent at one of the Community Centres in one of the most deprived Wards in the South West of England. However, it appears that this grant funding may have to be handed back to the Government which would be a tragedy. What actions have the Cabinet Member for Children and the Leader of the Council taken to ensure taken to ensure the grant funding is not returned, and the projects it was due to fund actually go ahead?

### **Answer to Question 4 provided by Councillor Bye**

Since Torbay was awarded Youth Investment Fund (YIF) funding the Acorn Centre board of trustees had on a number of occasions confirmed their intent to progress

with this project. However, come February 2024 the trustees changed their minds in respect of the scope of the project. To ensure the matter could be progressed, I as the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, arranged a meeting with the chair of trustees on the 19 February 2024. Kevin Foster, Torbay's then MP was also in attendance at this meeting. The trustees again gave their assurance they wished to proceed to enable the YIF programme to be successfully implemented. However subsequently the trustees asked for further changes to the scope of the programme, but the funders did not agree to the proposals and the Trustees agreed to proceed as planned. A new timeline was prepared, but in mid-August the Trustees sent a communication stating they no longer wished to proceed with the works.

With the support of Torbay Communities there are presently ongoing conversations and although the timescale becomes much tighter to deliver the proposal, we are continuing to do all we can to deliver this much need youth funding at the Acorn Centre.