

Priorities and Resources Review Panel 2025/2026 Key Lines of Enquiry Questions and Responses

Revenue Budget:

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

The Council has analysed the risks with regards to time limited grant funding utilised in 2024/25. In the event of such Council administered funding not continuing beyond 31 March 2025, continuity of service will be reviewed and, where possible, maintained through budget allocation or the drawdown of reserves.

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

Yes, this Fund is now within the base budget at £2,000 per Councillor. The Cabinet will consider whether this budget should be increased upon receipt of the final Settlement.

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

The draft Fees and Charges document, in some places, details 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 charge significantly less than others. However, these are officer calculations which should not have been published in the draft fees and charges document. We can confirm that the sports related fees for 2025/26 will increase by an average of 3.5%.

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 is raised through this in Torbay and what consideration has the Cabinet given to this using this income in the same way for Torbay?

The introduction of charging a 100% premium on second homes will commence from 1 April 2025. It is difficult to ascertain the exact amount of

additional income this will generate for the Council as, some home owners will either sell, or re-purpose their properties to avoid the additional tax implication. Based on a mid level scenario, we estimate that an additional £1.4m could be generated. This has been factored into the Council's 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 has 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 (due w/c 16 December 2024), the Cabinet will consider whether there is 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 our Housing Delivery Plan.

5. The report proposes 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%? Please provide a table setting out the two different rates of Council Tax per band between 4.75% and 4.99%.

The Council would generate an extra circa £219k if the Council Tax increase was set at the maximum limit to the cap set by Government as detailed in the table in Appendix 1:

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?

As detailed in the December 2024 Reserves Statement (as part of the 2025/26 budget papers) the Council will aim to set a General Reserve at £7.6m at 31 March 2025 which is 5% of the 2025/26 net revenue budget.

In addition to this we aim to retain a Comprehensive Spending Reserve at £3.2m which will continue to be utilised for 'invest to save' initiatives.

Capital Budget:

7. What is the governance around additional Government Grants for highways?

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 is 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.

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

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

There are two added complications here to be aware of:

- 1) we still don't have the grant conditions ; and**
- 2) how does devolution play into this and who are the decision makers in regards to the Local Transport Authority work.**

On the second part of the question, we are financially subsidising 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, these are demonstrating the investment too in newer more accessible vehicles.

We 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.

9. What is the current situation regarding Edginswell Railway Station?

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.

10. £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?

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 as detailed below.

10. That £75,000 Revenue funding be included in the base budget to support sport in 2024/2025 and future years.	The proposed budget now being put forward to the Council for consideration identifies £75,000 to be funded on a one-off basis from the increase in Public Health grant, with focus on supporting organisations to access external funding and become financially sustainable.
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However, the Cabinet will re-consider whether further one-off funding could be allocated into this area upon receipt of the final Settlement detail later this month.

11. 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?

SWISCo on behalf of Torbay Council are currently collating the feedback that was provided by Children’s Services consultation and engagement with play users over the summer months 2024 they are 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 areas basis and a report will come through to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in the last quarter of 2024/2025. Such detail is not known in time for budget proposal 2025/2026.

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

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

Homes England currently has 17 funds and we expect this to reduce 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 has 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.**

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

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

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 is managed by the Councils asset team, and is ring-fenced at £76k per year.

There is 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.

Q5 Table

Band	Torbay Council precept	Number of properties 30/11/24	Number of Properties after Discounts, Premiums and reliefs	96% Collection Rate	Precept at 4.75% increase	Precept at 4.99% increase	Loss of Precept/Saving to resident per property	Total Revenue with 4.75% increase	Total Revenue with 4.99% increase	Loss of revenue
A	1239.11	13781	9,091.69	8,728.02	1,297.97	1,300.94	2.97	11,328,711.23	11,354,633.46	25,922.23
B	1445.63	17841	13,992.35	13,432.66	1,514.30	1,517.77	3.47	20,341,070.98	20,387,682.30	46,611.32
C	1652.15	17166	14,512.59	13,932.09	1,730.63	1,734.59	3.96	24,111,286.69	24,166,457.75	55,171.06
D	1858.67	10763	9,758.22	9,367.89	1,946.96	1,951.42	4.46	18,238,909.45	18,280,690.25	41,780.79
E	2271.71	5451	5,043.76	4,842.01	2,379.62	2,385.07	5.45	11,522,142.88	11,548,531.84	26,388.95
F	2684.75	2423	2,270.05	2,179.25	2,812.28	2,818.72	6.44	6,128,655.57	6,142,689.92	14,034.36
G	3097.78	1287	1,217.28	1,168.59	3,244.92	3,252.36	7.44	3,791,977.17	3,800,671.47	8,694.30
H	3717.34	137	116.75	112.08	3,893.91	3,902.84	8.93	436,429.43	437,430.31	1,000.87
								95,899,183.40	96,118,787.29	219,603.88