

Priorities and Resources - Budget Question Plan Questions and Answers 2023 2024:

Fees and charges, budget digest and Medium Term Resource Plan can be found at

- [Budget 2023/24 - Torbay Council](#)
- Medium Term Resource Plan – circulated with the question plan

Meeting 1 – 19 January 2023

Thriving People: Adult and Community Services: Torbay Support Scheme

1. In relation to the Household Support Fund, is the £2.47 million already held on account by the Council? If not, what is the timescale for Central Government to provide this money together with the conditions of the grant so that Torbay Council can decide how to distribute it?

The funding for Household Support Fund (HSF) is pulled down through quarterly returns to DWP. At the beginning of the scheme delivery criteria are submitted to DWP and agreed to form the basis of claims through a standard proforma.

With HSF 1-3 the schemes have been announced with start and end dates with criteria and allocations announced at a later date. Based on the previous schemes this has usually been within 2 weeks of the go live date.

Funding for HSF1 (October 2021 – March 2022) & HSF2 (April 2022 – October 2022) has been received and distributed. HSF3 (October 2022 – March 2023) is ongoing. Spend data for October – December is currently being collated and will be reported to the DWP 23 January 2023.

2. Reference Question 1 above – whilst appreciating that details of grant conditions are awaited from Central Government, are there any proposed

plans in place for distribution and allocation of the monies and if so, what are they?

HSF3 will conclude at the end of March, with HSF 4 replacing this from April 23 – September and another commitment for HSF5 October to March 24. Criteria and allocations have not yet been announced by DWP. A working assumption of £1.2m and similar criteria i.e. food and fuel are being used to work up scheme options. This is also being cross referenced against other funding sources and schemes to try and provide coverage for the community and targeting of resource. Scheme options will be available for the end of January. An announcing form DWP may not be forth coming until March.

3. Exceptional Circumstances Fund – it is understood that one off payments will be made to our care experienced young people, as well as those who live in houses of multiple occupation – what other individuals will benefit from one off payments? How far into the co-design process are we with Torbay Community Helpline and when can we expect those design proposals to be available for consideration?

An initial assessment is current being undertaking mapping all the support schemes available both through the Council and government unitalities and the qualifying criteria. This is also being cross referenced against the need we are seeing as a service and information from partners such as the Community Development Trust, Food Banks and CAB. This will be used as an evidence base to inform discussions with partners as part of the codesign process and identify gaps or areas of most need. The information assessment will be completed by 27 January.

Some elements of the scheme have already through discussions with elected members and SLT e.g. payments for Foster Parents etc. This therefore leaves £250K for the Exceptional Circumstances Fund that will be considered. The scheme will be operational for April 2023.

4. Discretionary Housing payments – what is the criteria applicable to ensure fair process behind allocation?

Discretionary Housing Payments are available for those who receive Universal Credit or Housing Benefit to pay for shortfall in rent, rent in advance, deposits and rent arrears. If people need assistance but are not on the qualifying benefits, they can apply for assistance through welfare support. [Welfare Support - Torbay Council](#)

[Torbay Welfare Support Policy - Torbay Council](#)

The allocation from government for DHP has reduced from £625,048 in 2020- 2021 to £443,820 in 2021-2022 and £314,561 in 2022-23. Next years allocation has yet to be announce.

When considering applications, the households income, expenditure and capital is considered in addition to the list below:

- **Reductions in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit where the benefit cap has been applied.**
- **Reductions in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit for under-occupation in the social rented sector.**
- **Reductions in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit as a result of LHA restrictions.**
- **Rent officer restrictions such as local reference rent or shared room rate.**
- **Rent deposits and rent in advance (where the claimant is at risk of homelessness).**
- **Expenditure higher than income due to multiple debts and a substantial shortfall in the rent (refer to other agencies e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau for debt advice).**
- **Where an extra bedroom is needed due to medical reasons and it is unreasonable to expect the claimant to move home.**

- **Property is larger than current needs due to pregnancy. This will be considered where Housing Benefit/Universal Credit is restricted by size criteria and only within twelve weeks of the baby's due date.**
- **Medical condition making it difficult to move.**
- **Increases in essential work related expenditure such as increased fares to work if a claimant has had to move because they could not afford to live in proximity to their work following a reduction in their LHA rates.**
- **Short term emergency, crisis in family etc.**
- **Assistance to secure a new tenancy where the decision maker considers there is an urgent/essential need to move such as at risk of homelessness.**
- **Assist the claimant to retain an existing tenancy.**

Links to both the application page and policy are provide below.

[Discretionary Housing Payments \(DHP\) and Council Tax](#)

[Discretionary awards - Torbay Council](#) (link to Council website for applications and information on the scheme)

[Discretionary Housing Payments Policy \(DHP\) - Torbay Council](#)

Thriving People: Children's Services: Home to School Transport Cost Reduction and Application of Social Care Grant

6. Home to School transport costs - how will the reduction be managed? How will assessment of risks and mitigations be planned and reviewed regularly for all young people and what are the additional resource implications in that respect? (Savings versus any additional resources required for ongoing assessment/monitoring).

Torbay is very focused on establishing monitoring arrangements for all aspects of its expenditure and school transport costs are but one element of this monitoring. We strive however, to ensure that all

children and young people who essentially require transport receive the support that they require. We are therefore scheduling a route and branch review of the continuing need of all children and young people who are currently assessed as eligible for school transport. This review will consider:

- **All young people currently in year 10 /11 to understand whether any will benefit from ‘independent travel training opportunities’ which is an initiative developed as part of our work to prepare children for young adulthood.**
- **All children and young people currently in receipt of 1:1 travel. We shall consider whether there are opportunities for creating shared routes which would optimise to use of staff and vehicles.**
- **All cared for children who live with Foster Carers to establish whether children’s needs would be better served by their carers taking responsibility for the transport arrangements as part of their daily family life.**
- **All children and young people at mainstream education currently in receipt of home to school transport. We will establish whether there are opportunities for using individual travel allowances or shared arrangements.**
- **Shared arrangements for children and young people at specialist schools.**

This work will enable us to confidently understand current and future demand and provide us with the capability to project costs and savings.

7. Children’s Services - Application of Social Care Grant – predicted overspend of £2 million in 2022/2023. Therefore £2 million of the social care grant increase has been allocated to this service. How confident are you that the predicted overspend will not increase further due to current inflationary and increased supplier costs and how will this impact on the Children’s Services

proposed budget for 2023/2024, e.g. will this result in further cuts being made elsewhere within the Service?

Children's Services has established a good 'track record' in budget managements throughout the period of its three-year improvement work. The service has focused and will continue to do so, on all parts of the service to ensure that cost efficiency remains high on the agenda. Its work on ensuring that care solutions are used expediently and only when children need to be protected has been successful in reducing costs overall. The service is allocated a portion of the social care grant as they deliver children's statutory services. As a service we have determined that the budget needs to reflect in the service area which has the highest pressure which is the identification and delivery of good quality alternative care solutions that meet the needs of our cared for and care experienced children and young people. The service knows its care population well and is increasingly able to enable children to benefit from care arrangements with foster carers or in formal arrangements with relatives, both of which are preferable and cheaper options to high-cost residential care and mitigate any exceptional increases in supplier costs. Further, based upon its detailed and contemporary data and performance information the service can confidently predict costs associated with current and anticipated future demand for services. These current cost and future forecast data re scrutinised on a fortnightly/monthly basis by the Councils DCS, CEX, and Chief Finance Officer. Budgetary risks associated with unexpected requirements to care for children with highly complex needs in 'high cost placements' are factored into the budget planning cycle and monitored closely to mitigate their worst effects on the children's service overall budget.

We're aware that there have been challenges in this financial year due to an increase in year unit cost of individual placements or commissioned services, a lack of provision resulting in high-cost unregulated provision options required, a reduction in foster care placements and the increase

in the mandatory numbers of UASC that each Local Authority is required to support.

As a service we forecast our overall spend at the start of the financial year and review in line with predictions following analysis of our previous financial positioning, this supports our ability to be as accurate in our base budget build for placements at the start of the financial year.

Council Fit for Future: Reduced Costs Associated with the Operation of the Town Hall and Investment in Inclusion Officer

8. Reduced costs associated with operation of Town Hall. What alternative options have been considered?

An options appraisal looked at 3 scenarios, these were: Do nothing, full closure of the whole complex and finally, a partial closure of the complex. Clearly, the do nothing option created no savings or reduction in carbon footprint and continued the status quo. A full closure of the complex in time to release savings in year was not viable due to the need to find alternative assets to house multiple requirements and also find a future use for the vacated assets. A longer term asset plan is underway linked to the Union Square and Oldway projects; these may enable full closure of the Town Hall complex, but any plan will rely on a new use being secured and income from new development being able to support a modern government mandate.

9. How will the newly created post of Inclusion Officer be funded now and into the future? Is it full time FTE or part time? Fixed term or permanent contract?

This post's funding has been integrated into the base budget to support a full time, permanent position.
