

Priorities and Resources Key Lines of Enquiry/Questions and Answers

Overview of Budget

Q1. The Overview and Scrutiny Co-Ordinator has reviewed Torbay Council's Profile document and has requested the Priorities and Resources Review Panel to explore and how the Cabinet was planning to tackle the issues identified through the Revenue Budget for 2024/2025 and has requested a written response in respect of the following areas:

1. It's significant that 24% of residents (nearly 1 in 4) are reported as having a long-term limiting illness. This is more than the national average of 17.6%. Torbay has the highest rate in Devon, with East Devon and Torridge being the next highest areas with 21%. These rates are significantly higher than the South West average of 18.4%. **(Lincoln Sargeant/Councillor Tranter)**

Torbay has comparatively high rates of people in poverty and in older age, both of which contribute to the likelihood of experiencing long term health conditions. Our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and all of our work with partners, highlights comparative health inequalities and where we need to target support to improve the health and wellbeing of those experiencing worse outcomes. Early prevention is crucial, tackling the factors that drive ill-health and poor wellbeing. 0-19 services work with families on the foundations for future health. Public Health commissions Your Health Torbay which works with people on changes to improve their health in future life (diet, activity, smoking). Our partnerships on healthy ageing, mental health, and CVD, focus on early intervention to reduce the incidence and impact of long-term illness. A new area of work with Anchor institution partners is looking to support people with long term conditions into employment that is appropriate to and accommodates their condition.

See response at Appendix 1

2. 27% of the Torbay population live in an area classified as amongst the 20% most deprived in England. The area is ranked as the 38th most deprived out of 151 upper-tier local authorities. **(Lincoln Sargeant/Councillor Tranter)**

Torbay's deprivation rate is the highest in the South-West. Our highest deprivation rating relates to 'Employment deprivation'. This measures the proportion of the working age population involuntarily excluded from the labour market through sickness, unemployment, disability or caring responsibilities. Highest rates of deprivation are concentrated in the central areas of Torquay and Paignton. All of our work programmes and partnerships are targeted to support those with highest levels of deprivation most, tackling both the prevention of poverty and support for those experiencing financial hardship. Our Turning the Tide on Poverty programme works with partners across key areas (children and families, ill-health, housing,

employment) to identify opportunities to support, promote and maximise opportunity for all.

See response at Appendix 1

3. Torbay has high levels of children that are cared for by the Local Authority. Whilst this has fallen slightly over the last couple of years, rates are close to double the England average and twice the rate of other areas in the South West. The rate of Section 47 enquiries is also extremely high at 321 per 10,000. This is over double the South West average (145 per 10,000) and nearly double the England average (164 per 10,000). **(Nancy Meehan/Councillor Bye)**

I would suggest this is an understatement. We have significantly reduced our cared for numbers however we will be impacted for some years due to the high historical number of children who became cared for. The impact of early help and prevention is fundamental to the reduction of statutory intervention, which includes section 47s.

It is unclear as yet the impact of the wide-reaching children's reforms or how these will be funded, presently we are considering the impact of some of the reforms that have already been implemented.

4. Torbay has consistently had one of the lower rates of full-time average weekly earnings across Devon at £473. The only area with a lower average was North Devon who reported £452, the highest was South Hams at £542. **(Alan Denby/Councillor Chris Lewis)**

The Council's economic strategy, using data covering the period 2015-2021 sets out that despite a 30% increase in wages for people working in Torbay since 2015, income remain below the average. From 2015 to 2021, people working in Torbay earned less than the comparator locations as well as the national and regional averages. In 2021, people working in Torbay earned on average¹ £412.70, compared to regional and national averages of £464.10 and £540.40. Additionally, those living in Torbay but work outside of the area in 2021 on average earned around £452.56, a figure £39.60 higher than people working and living in Torbay, suggesting better salaries can be achieved working outside of Torbay. The strategy sets priorities to;

- support innovators, entrepreneurs and business owners
- Building on our economic specialisms (for instance electronics, tourism, fisheries)
- Helping our community and residents to reach their economic potential and build an inclusive economy
- Maximising economic value of natural capital

¹ Part-time and full-time average workplace-based earnings

the actions included in the strategy will, if able to be delivered, complement the physical regeneration of the place and support improvement in Torbay's economy.

5. 23% of residents are in private rented accommodation which the highest in Devon, with Exeter and Plymouth also reporting figures of over 20%. This is much higher than the South West and national figure of 17%. The 8% of residents living in social rented homes is the lowest in Devon (and across the South West) and dramatically lower than the South West figure of 13% and England figure of 18%. To put this into context both Exeter and Plymouth have double the percentage of social housing stock compared with Torbay. **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

This is true, the impact is significant on our ability to support people into their own home. A larger social housing supply would enable us to re-house more individuals and families into homes.

We are considering all options available to us across Torbay. Torbay Council took a decision to bring Torre Vista back to the control of the council. This included the following requirement:

The Director of Pride in Place be instructed to:

Develop detailed delivery plans, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Finance and Corporate Services and all Group Leaders (or their nominees), setting out how the Council will accelerate the provision of new Affordable Housing, targeted to meet Torbay's local housing need, specifically including Social Rented Housing; and Affordable Rented Housing

6. In 2018, approximately 7,000 private sector tenants in Torbay were in receipt of Housing Benefit, which equates to 60% of private sector tenants. This is considerably higher than both Exeter (23%) and Plymouth (32%). This places a significant reliance on the private rented sector to meet the needs of households on lower incomes, who are eligible for Housing Benefit. **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

The private sector is becoming increasingly inaccessible for not only households on a low income and in receipt of housing benefit but also people on an average income who do not qualify for financial help. This is due to the inflated rental market in the bay where increased demand, high interest rates and properties lost to the market due to being sold, has driven up rent values to rates many people can no longer afford. This correlates with homelessness figures, many landlords are evicting tenants on lower incomes and in receipt of Local Housing Allowance, (LHA), in order to market the property at market rent. This is compounded by high interest rates which is pricing many small landlords out of the market and is unfortunately making the rent increases necessary.

The recent increase in LHA will partially mitigate this. The Council has appointed a private sector housing support officer who has been successful in supporting people to access private sector housing affordably.

7. Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) records indicate that over 70% of Torbay's housing stock is rated D or lower (Bands D to G). This percentage is much higher than the national England average of 54% which was reported in the 2020/21 England House Conditions Survey. All affordable housing stock will need to meet EPC B and C by 2030. **(Alan Denby/Councillor Chris Lewis)**

The Council's Housing Strategy identifies three priorities improving housing supply, improving housing support and improving housing quality. Under this last priority there is a commitment that the Council will work with its partners to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty. The evidence base for the strategy sets out that 75% of the housing stock is below band C. Identifying where the Council can collaborate with partners for instance through the Strategic Housing Board is one area where the Council can positively influence change in addition to any required enforcement and supporting adaptation of homes.

8. During 2020/21, 1,051 households in Torbay were assessed as homeless. The homeless rate for Torbay of 13.17 per 1000 households was the 11th highest out of 314 Councils in England, twice the South West and England rate. **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

The highest cause of homelessness in Torbay is loss of rented accommodation, tenants are either priced out due to inflated market rents or landlords are selling as it's no longer financially viable for them. The limited availability of suitable, affordable housing has meant more households need temporary accommodation which has caused a significant cost pressure both in the resource needed to respond to increased assessments but also in providing accommodation. The Council will continue its focus on preventative support, helping individuals and families back into secure and sustainable housing.

9. In 2019/20, 67% of adults self-reported as being overweight or obese. This is more than in 2016/17 when a figure of 62% was reported. **(Lincoln Sargeant/Councillor Tranter)**

See response at Appendix 1

10. Torbay has the 3rd highest rate of suicides when compared with all unitary and county council areas in England. During 2019 to 2021, Torbay reported 58 suicides which equates to a rate of 17.2 per 100,000 population. This is very high when compared with the South West rate of 12.0 and England rate of 10.4. During 2016-

18 Torbay reported a rate of 19.5 which is the worst figure it has reported when looking back over the last two decades. **(Lincoln Sargeant/Councillor Tranter)**

See response at Appendix 1

11. Crime rates in Torbay for 2020/21 were reported as 10,470. This is 50% higher than the overall average for the Devon and Cornwall force area. **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

Crime rates in Devon and Cornwall Police Force area are some of the lowest in the country. Torbay is high within our area, but this is in the context that the overall area is safe.

However, Torbay, Exeter and Plymouth regularly experience the highest levels of crime reporting across Devon and Cornwall, which given size and populations densities would be expected. Torbay's disproportionate levels of deprivation also mean that it suffers from higher potential drivers of crime and disorder than other parts of the region. The table below taken from our Strategic Needs Assessment indicates where Torbay is positioned comparatively both within the region and with our family comparison areas (illustrated with 21/22 data).

In terms of crime types and levels, the following data demonstrate the reporting trends for additional years and the breakdown of crime reporting categories that are represented in 21/22s reported crime statistics for Torbay.

Violence, including domestic abuse, features a significant portion of reported crime. We also know that drugs can also present as a link with such forms of crime. Consequently, the CSP has formulated its priorities around domestic abuse and sexual violence, drugs and exploitation. The CSP is also leading on work around the implementation of Torbay's responsibilities to Serious Violence which places a statutory duty on partnerships to consider and respond to serious violence as a thematic area. In terms of governance, there are various Boards established to oversee the detail of the work within these areas.

- Torbay Drug and Alcohol Partnership (statutory)
- Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (statutory)
- Serious Violence and Exploitation agendas both overseen by CSP, with various multi-agency forums constituting work under the exploitation thematic (with direct links to CYSP too)

A Serious Violence Strategy is making its way through governance processes, DASV Strategy was approved last year, the Drug and Alcohol Partnership work towards to an established plan (conducted following health needs assessment) and the CSP will develop a Community SAFETY Strategy in 2024.

QUICK FACTS – POLICE RECORDED CRIME

Current figures refer to the 12 month period ending 31 March 2022

Level of Crime 11,323 crimes / 83 crimes per 1000 resident population

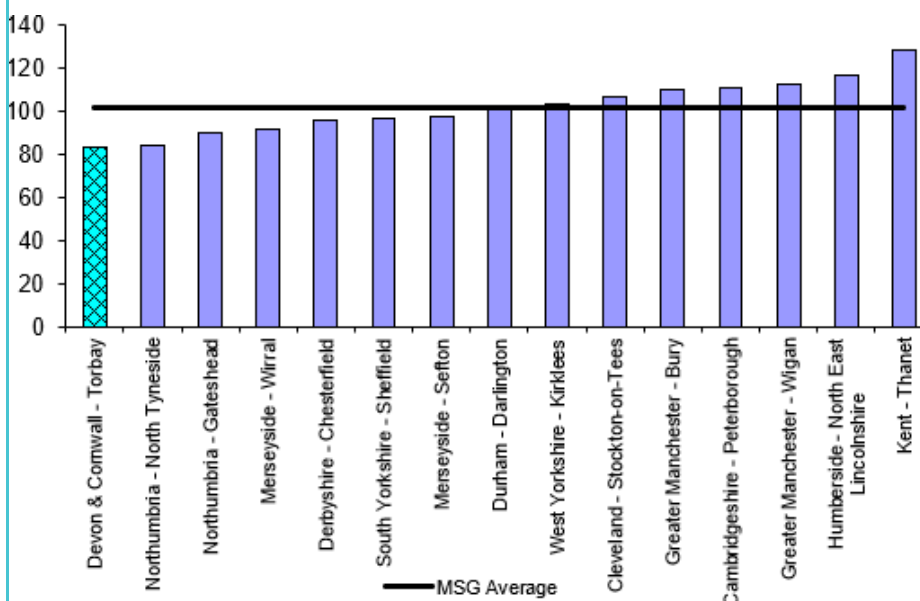
Change since 2020/21 Increase by 853 crimes, 8.1%.

Family comparison

Overall rate of crime per 1,000 Residents

Torbay 83.1

Family Average 101.9



- In 2021/22 the Adult Social Care Service received 8,420 requests for support, compared to the reported 5,407 received in 2020/21. 771 people received one off support, compared with the reported figure of 443 in 2020/21. 2,226 people received short term reablement services to help them gain independence compared to 1,275 in 2020/21. 1,092 people started to receive an ongoing support service including community activities compared to 544 in 2020/21. In 2021/22, 4,747 carers are currently on Torbay’s Carers Register. The service assessed and reviewed 1,355 carers in 2020/21. **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust are receiving more requests for help and providing more care. We are currently scoping a contract with the community and voluntary sector to keep people well and independent via their services

In addition we will be working with a delivery partner to reinforce our policies to work in a strengths based way with people. This minimises and delays the statutory help people access.

- 13 Recruiting and retaining staff to work in adult social care is a significant challenge nationally, and the South West is the worst performing region in this respect. **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

We have good staffing retention in Torbay, with a focus on decent wages and a commitment to value and develop staff. There are few problems with care availability, other in some specialist niches.

Children

- Q2. The proposals include £1.9m investment in Children's Services, with a predicted overspend of £1.4m, in 2023/2024 what assurance can be given that £1.9m is sufficient to cover increased costs for 2024/2025? **(Nancy Meehan/Councillor Bye)**

We will continue to have robust Director of Children's Services, (DCS), oversight at the monthly budget meetings and our Directorate Leadership Team meeting with robust challenge to all officers in respect of the spend. Within children's all staff are acutely aware of the budget position and the need to scrutinise any spend.

- Q3. How long will it take us to have comparable spend to other similar size Councils for Children's Social Care? **(Nancy Meehan/Councillor Bye)**

This is a challenge due to the historical numbers of who were taken into in care and who we will have a corporate responsibility for as part of their care journey. It is also impacted on by the wider reaching children's reforms which will be required to be implemented.

- Q4. What opportunities are there for increased savings and efficiencies to reduce overall costs to Children's Services? **(Nancy Meehan/Councillor Bye)**

We continue to consider all spend in children's services and unlike many other local authorities have successfully managed to either underspend or balance the children budget for the last couple of years. Unfortunately, we are impacted due to the national challenge relating to placement costs, regulatory requirements to register provision post 16 and recruitment challenges. At this present time the main focus is the Home to School transport.

- Q5. How will the school transport review be carried out and what is the timeline for this? **(Nancy Meehan/Councillor Bye)**

This is underway at present. It has been significantly hampered due to the lack of processes and systems within the transport team itself. The first four months has required the reviewer to overhaul the service and to implement appropriate structures to simplify the mechanisms of agreeing home to school transport. It appears that initially the team would

automatically agree taxis with no clear reference to alternative modes of transport and also a number of decisions for taxis did not fall within the legal framework. There was no route optimisation considered and we provided taxis for children who were not attending school or could have had alternative options such as school bus passes. There was also a lack of scrutiny in respect of invoicing and payments to the commissioned drivers.

The written report will be available by the end of this financial year, However, due to the requirements to reduce the spend. We have already implemented a panel process for reviewing every request along with requesting a travel trainer post to be advertised.

- Q6. What was the 2023/2024 Home to School Transport Budget, what was the projected overspend and the number of children and young people who successfully made a transition to independent travel? **(Nancy Meehan/Councillor Bye)**

Spend on Home to school transport has increased significantly year on year

18/19 - 2,145,985 (base budget was 1,914,700) number of children 711

19/20 - 2,315,988 (base budget was 2,224,800) number of 656

20/21 - 2,593,778 (base budget was 2,434,500) - number of children 409

21/22 - 3,208,108 (base budget was 2,434,500) number of children 823

22/23 - 3,902,010 (base Budget was 2,897,411) - number of children 678

23/24 - 4,251,550 (projection) (base budget was 3,239,759) - number of children approx. 745

This in essence means there has been a 98.12% increase from 18/19 to the present day.

There have been no pupils who successfully made a transition to independent travel.

- Q7. Reductions to home to school transport have been made in previous year's budgets but the savings have not been realised, what progress has been made to make changes and what reassurance can be given that the targets will be met this time? **(Nancy Meehan/Councillor Bye)**

Please see above commentary.

Adult and Community Services

Housing and Homelessness

- Q8. How much extra funding will be going to Leonard Stocks and will this be used to implement some of the recommendations made by the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board homelessness review? **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

The Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board homeless review made a number of recommendations, several of which have already been implemented. A new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be produced over the next five months and will also assess the recommendation through consultation with partners and users of services. This will allow for a full assessment and integrated approach ensuring that the needs of the service users are met. The funding of such could be provided in a variety of different ways and not limited to the additional funding specific to these recommendations, therefore providing greater opportunity.

- Q9. Please could some more detail on the improvements to "accommodation pathways and commissioning plans" to alleviate homelessness be provided? **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

The insourcing of the hostel and the reduction in the average length of stay from over 500 days to around 170 in less than 12 months has significantly improved the pathway for single homeless clients. This requires further development which will be addresses in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and will require a blend of accommodation options in order to ensure the hostel can be our off the street offer of accommodation for rough sleepers.

Leasing of small Houses in Multiple Occupation, (HMOs), to provide move on accommodation is being trialled. The Adults and Community Directorate are now working together to develop commissioning plans to commission housing which will support people with specialist needs such as mental health problems.

- Q10. The proposals include £900,000 investment in temporary accommodation and preventing homelessness, Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring was projecting £1.020m overspend within the Housing Service, what action has been taken to reduce the in-year overspend and is £900,000 sufficient to meet the pressures in this area given the continued cost of living crisis? **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

Temporary accommodation numbers have been driven down through robust management and focussed preventative work. The use of bed and bed breakfast for families has been eliminated and the use of bed and breakfast for single people has reduced by almost 80%. Numbers being accommodated are therefore reducing, although we should not be complacent and demand on the service still remains high.

Significant work is being undertaken to ensure sufficiency, cost effectiveness and appropriateness of the accommodation for emergency temporary use. A number of measures are in the process of being implemented to deliver cost avoidance to mitigate any additional increase in expenditure, which is also a problem being experienced by other local authorities due to the cost-of-living crisis.

The 2023/24 overspend includes expenditure on the provision of temporary accommodation, but also prevention activity, which has increased significantly. The purchase of family temporary accommodation has now been implemented; a financial recovery plan is being closely monitored.

Q11. How is the investment in housing and homelessness being allocated between meeting demand and prevention? **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

The level of expenditure on homelessness activity has increased significantly by £900,000, the exact split of this additional funding is still being worked through but will include the Hostel, temporary accommodation and prevention work.

Prevention is key to mitigate costs and provide better outcomes for households. The type of prevention activities available however have become increasingly challenging due the availability of affordable accommodation. This is because of the general cost of living increases and the increasing cost of privately rented accommodation.

Q12. How much is proposed to be spent on temporary housing and what is the deployment of this additional money? **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

Any funds that are attributed to the provision of temporary housing will meet the cost of providing this accommodation. They will not be deployed in any specific way or through any specific provider. Overall temporary accommodation is provided through a variety of means, contracts that are in place, leased, owned and spot purchased accommodation. Work is ongoing to ensure the most appropriate and cost effective way of delivery is undertaken.

Place

- Q13. What is the current cost of all outstanding repairs and maintenance and how is this funding going to be prioritised? **(Alan Denby/Councillor Chris Lewis)**

The Council has a large property portfolio which includes operational buildings and estate in addition to the investment estate. The portfolio is assessed through a rolling programme of condition surveys. These surveys, which include assets where the Council retains responsibility for leased assets, but excludes schools and the public toilets managed through Healthmatic, show an overall backlog maintenance forecast at £49.6M. This is across three priority assessments with circa £14.5M identified as urgent or essential works.

The bulk of the backlog costs relate to a small proportion of the overall estate which includes infrastructure, car parks and heritage assets such as Torre Abbey and Oldway.

Budgets for repairs and maintenance have had to be reduced over the past decade and recent economic shocks have stretched it further and this is the reason why additional funding has been identified. Initially £200k extra revenue funding has been added to the base budget for 2024/25 with further uplifts of £200k per annum proposed over future years.

- Q14. What proportion of the additional spend on repairs and maintenance has been allocated to assist community centres? **(Alan Denby/Councillor Billings)**

None of the additional spend has been allocated to any particular use at this time. In respect of the Community Centres and indeed other Council leased assets typically the assets are leased with a repairing and insuring liability which will mean that day to day wear while in the term of the lease is the responsibility of the tenant to repair.

It is recommended that the additional budget, if agreed, is used against essential or urgent repairs.

- Q15. How will residents be able to influence what discounts are included in the Residents' Discount Scheme? **(Alan Denby/Councillor David Thomas)**

The detail of the scheme is being worked up to ensure residents can benefit from a range of discounts on parking, public toilets and leisure facilities. The scheme will be iterative, it will be launched with set discounts in place and the opportunity for residents to provide feedback and suggestions on how the scheme can be improved through the council's website.

- Q16. What parameters have been explored in respect to Residents' Discounts? **(Alan Denby/Councillor David Thomas)**

Research has been carried out into discount and technical options, costs and feasible delivery of a Resident Discount Scheme. These include but are not limited to the number of car parks to be included in the scheme, the number of uses of public toilets that could be made available, the types of discounts Leisure providers are prepared to offer, accessibility of the scheme to residents (e.g. access to online services), technical limitations (e.g. of car parking machines), direct and indirect costs to the Council and value for money for residents.

- Q17. How will the proposed investment on Operation Town Centres (£300,000) be deployed, will it complement the work of the Police and other agencies and is this sufficient to address the ongoing problems of anti-social behaviour in our Town Centres? **(Alan Denby/Jo Williams/Councillor Billings/Councillor Lewis/Councillor Tranter)**

The Council is investing in additional Town Centre Wardens and Anti Social Behaviour, (ASB), staff.

The newly implemented Operation Town Centres funding will dovetail into increased ASB and Vulnerability officer and Town Centre Warden capacity. This along with enhanced partnership activity and collocated Police officers provides a robust team. The Police have deployed capacity to address ASB in our Town Centres

In addition a new enforcement team will be established within SWISCo services, there will be a team of 6 who will be deployed across the bay in targeted areas, along with increased support for vulnerable people, to enforce the Councils PSPOs and use powers available to the Council to prevent and enforce environmental crime and reduce anti-social behaviour across Torbay. The medium and long term aim is to reduce the costs associated with dealing with the impacts of ASB incurred by the Council and our partners, and improve quality of life for our residents and visitors. The work will be monitored to measure the successful achievement of these aims. This team will work collaboratively with town centre wardens, ASB and Vulnerability officers, police and other partners as part of a multi-agency team.

In addition to interventions set out here the Council has reviewed its capital programme and the processes around the capital programme, in particular the town centre focused projects, to identify how the positive changes that the community wishes to see can be delivered more quickly. The selection of Wilmott Dixon with Milligan as the Council's regeneration partner will have a positive impact on the deliverability of the town centre schemes they are charged with delivery of. The Council continues to seek additional public and private investment to bring about change in the town centres and the wider Torbay economy which will create more economic opportunities.

- Q18. The Review of Events, Culture and Tourism has already identified the need for investment in the Events and Culture Team to enable the Council and partners to deliver the Events Strategy, Heritage Strategy and Destination Management Plan, why is this money being put into a reserve £1m over four years, rather than the Cabinet investing in the resources needed to deliver events in 2024/2024 and future years? **(Alan Denby/Councillor Jackie Thomas)**

The decision to invest £1m over 4 years to deliver the strategy is intended to support delivery of events in 2024/25 and future years. The experience the Council has had with event organisers is that there continues to be a need for the Council to build confidence in Torbay as a sustainable location for events.

- Q19. Given the significant costs of the English Riviera Airshow in the past, what assurance can the Cabinet make that the reserve is sufficient to cover all events as well as any shortfall for the Airshow? **(Alan Denby/Councillor Jackie Thomas)**

As a result of a Council decision to provide a reserve fund of £1m for Events, Heritage and Destination Management Plan, a plan to invest this funding will be developed with the aim of maximising the benefits of the fund. It is estimated that the fund will be sufficient to cover support for at least three headline events (not including Airshow) and some capital investment into event space to attract new events to the bay. The project team aims to deliver the airshow on budget through sponsorship and a range of income generating schemes.

- Q20. What consideration has been given to capital investment to help support infrastructure for events? **(Alan Denby/Councillor Jackie Thomas)**

Capital investment in order to improve drainage, increase electricity and water supplies and protect grassed areas, is estimated to be circa £400,000. Some of this activity is planned to be achieved through the £1m reserve to be spent over 4 years, the detail of this will be developed following any budget decision made.

Corporate

- Q21. The Government has ceased the funding for the Household Support Fund. How much was this in 2023/2024 and how was this spent? How is the Council plugging this gap? **(Malcolm Coe/Councillor Tyerman)**

£2,470,000 Household Support funding was provided by Government in 2023/24 with the main areas of spend being:

- Payment to low-income households receiving a welfare benefit – budget £1,450,000 (mitigated to some extent in 2024/25 by increases in benefits and pensions);
- Food banks £150,000;
- Food Supermarkets £250,000;
- Baby banks and Homestore £40,000;
- Debt advice services £128,000;
- Care Leavers £56,200;
- Essentials linked to water and energy for people on a disability benefit £50,000;
- Family Hub issued food vouchers £60,000

Any unspent balance at year end will be retained in an earmarked reserve and carried forward for prioritisation in 2024/25.

Further Household Support Funding from 1 April 24 has not yet been announced. Local Authorities have contributed to the LGA report that has been submitted stating the need for support to continue. We are having to wait until the budget on 6th March 2024 to see if there is an announcement. If Funding isn't continued into 2024/25 one of the main impacts will be on our support to food banks and Food Supermarkets. We are currently in dialogue with the Torbay Food Alliance and will be considering how and whether we can support them with funding moving forward.

In terms of providing on-going support to those residents who are struggling the most, through the cost of living crisis, the Council has launched a new Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25, adding £550k to the base revenue budget which will be passported directly to Torbay residents in the form of increased benefit.

Increases in Local Housing Allowance, from April 2024, will also provide further financial support to those residents within rented accommodation.

Q22. The Council's IT strategy is mentioned, is it possible to get a copy of this to understand it better? **(Matthew Fairclough-Kay/Councillor Jackie Thomas)**

See attached document.

Q23. Do we have a record of the viewing figures for Council meetings for 2023/2024? **(Matthew Fairclough-Kay/Councillor Jackie Thomas)**

Viewing Figures May 2023 to January 2024

	May	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Total
Cabinet			376	282	432	547	260	193	232	10	2,332
Council	365	824		1,000		5,600			551		8,340
Planning		394	578	405	846	612	302	308		67	3,512
Total	365	1218	954	1687	1278	6759	562	501	783	77	14,184

Viewers since published (including those who watched the livestream)

Q24. How much will the purchase of the hybrid meeting new kit be? What is the cost of the alterations? How does this compare to the current costs? **(Matthew Fairclough-Kay/Councillor Jackie Thomas)**

How much will the purchase of the hybrid meeting new kit be?

A procurement exercise is planned following the Banking Hall alterations, which are nearing completion. Work to date suggests that costs will be circa £50,000 capital (one off) with £15-20,000 yearly revenue charges. Depending upon automation available, against value for money considerations, it may be better value to employ a technician to support meetings rather than pay for increased automation, costs for such resource are circa £15,000 per annum. This gives a total of circa £35,000 per annum revenue costs for provisioning the Banking Hall with hybrid equipment.

What is the cost of the alterations?

The Council currently hires rooms at the Riviera International Conference Centre, due to the Town Hall not being Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. Investment made to redevelop the Banking Hall on the ground floor of the Town Hall as the main meeting venue for public meetings, costing £42,667 in this financial year (23/24), will enable a DDA compliant venue and negate the need for external room hire for these requirements.

How does this compare to the current costs?

The Council currently spends £86,795 per annum on PA, recording, hybrid and livestreaming our public meetings.

The current annual cost of room hire is £15,190.

This gives a total cost of £101,985 per annum against a potential cost of circa £35,000 per annum.

At this stage, it has not been decided whether or not we will relocate Full Council meetings to the Banking Hall. This decision will be made once we have a market response for hybrid equipment and have costs for furniture, which will allow value for money to be assessed for Full Council. This decision will impact the scale of annual savings available by up to £30,334 per annum along with any capital cost associated with one off purchases.

In any event, it can be seen that considerable savings are achievable in the financial year 2024/25 against current revenue costs. Likewise, the return on investment for capital expenditure required will be relatively short.

- Q25. There is a shortage in qualified legal staff across the Country, what is the Council doing to make it more attractive to work for our Legal Team to ensure that we have sufficient capacity across all disciplines? **(Matthew Fairclough-Kay/Councillor Jackie Thomas)**

As a Council, Torbay keeps under review and takes steps to ensure an attractive and competitive remuneration and benefits package, for both retention and recruitment. This we have benchmarked against our neighbouring authorities regionally and considered those nationally also.

It promotes the Council's geographical location and benefits, enabling hybrid working to retain and attract an excellent and motivated workforce. Likewise, it accesses available

funding and opportunities to enable professional development and champions career progression, in a supportive environment.

Furthermore, the Council is championed and marketed as a progressive, forward thinking unitary authority, recognising its recent 'Most Improved Council' LGC Award, where unprecedented investment is currently experienced, which has enabled its own ambitious transformation programme, giving Torbay the opportunity to capitalise on the area's profile and many assets, with Legal Services at the heart of the organisation, giving the legal team a real opportunity to shape its services, within a supportive environment.

There has also been targeted and successful recruitment within Legal Services to ensure roles and responsibilities are allocated appropriately, enabling greater capacity for senior qualified employees to focus on high level and more complex matters, and to provide supervision and professional development to those more junior employees, aiding succession planning and future proofing of service delivery, where possible.

In terms of recruitment and advertising, we have used, and continue to use a broad range of avenues to the market, as well as making best use of the new recruitment system to attract talent.

- Q26. Could 15 to 20% savings be made from the Senior Leadership Team Budget? Have we compared our cost of our Senior Leadership Team to other similar Unitary authorities so that money could be released to provide more funding for investment in operational service delivery? **(Anne-Marie Bond/Councillor David Thomas)**

A simple question as to whether savings could be made from the cost of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), the answer has to be yes as the level of staffing is an element of the budget that can be varied. However it is the implications of doing so that have to be very carefully considered. Since 2011 the Council has reduced staffing numbers by over 40%, including a corresponding reduction in historic SLT posts. As a consequence we have a lean structure throughout. The senior leadership team are intrinsic to our overall success as a Council. Inter alia they ensure that the strategy and priorities set by members are implemented; they support members and the democratic process; they ensure that the budgets are controlled; they organise operational delivery and they support our staff. The Council has an ambitious programme of delivery and improvement which needs to be well led to ensure delivery. It is the clear recommendation of the Chief Executive to all Members that it would be to the detriment of the delivery of services and priorities were the Council to reduce the current numbers of our senior officers.

In respect of comparisons elsewhere, this is never an exact science as the approach taken to who is deemed to be a part of a senior leadership team can differ between places, and therefore does not necessarily mean that there are additional members of senior staff in one place as compared to another. For example, over the last 12 months as a part of a more inclusive leadership approach within Torbay, the Deputy Head of Finance now sits as a part of SLT as do the two Consultants within Public Health. These are not new roles, and there is no additional cost of them now doing so, rather as already said it has been a local choice as to their engagement with other senior managers across the organisation.

What is more comparable across Council's is the number of Directors, however by law we are required to have;

- Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive)
- S.151 Officer (Director of Finance)
- Monitoring Officer (Head of Legal Services)
- Director of Childrens
- Director of Adults
- Director of Public Health

These are all posts in place in Torbay, to which in addition we have the Director of Pride in Place and the Director of Corporate Services.

If we were to do a comparison with a local authority of similar size, levels of deprivation and also a coastal community, the closest match would be Blackpool, whose population is just 1500 more than ours. They have the statutory posts that we have, plus in addition they have a Director of Strategy and Assistant Chief Executive, a Director of Governance, a Director of Communication and Regeneration and a Director of Community and Environmental Services. Thus making a Directorate Team of nine as compared to seven in Torbay.

Revenue Reserves Policy

Q27. What is the rationale for the change to the approach for managing the Council's Reserves? **(Malcolm Coe/Councillor Tyerman)**

The Council has previously held a high volume of financial reserves. Many of these reserves have shown no financial movement, or have been reviewed, for several years. The intention behind the revised Financial Reserves Policy, (as detailed within the 2024/25 draft budget papers), is to provide greater transparency on the holding, and purpose of financial reserves through rationalising the volume of earmarked reserves into a smaller number of more strategic holdings with clearly stated purpose.

A review of the Council's reserves also had to be undertaken to account for known, and committed, one-off costs which have previously been reported to Council. These include the residual cost of the School Private Finance Initiative, (PFI), contract for its remaining duration, (2027), and the Council approved £1.5m write off of working capital loans previously drawn-down by TorVista Homes.

The new Reserves Policy also reinforces the need to retain an appropriate level of General Fund and Comprehensive Spending Review Reserves alongside the rationalisation of earmarked reserves.

Q28. What is the reason for the increase in the Collection Fund and how this will be used particularly in respect of the Westlands Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funding? **(Malcolm Coe/Councillor Tyerman)**

In year changes in yield and collection of National Non-Domestic Rate will result in a Collection Fund surplus or deficit which will impact on the following financial year. The

Council holds a Collection Fund reserve to help smooth the volatility of income. Estimates of future year surpluses or deficits are included in the Budget Setting process and reflected in the Medium-Term Resource Plan. Any shortfall incurred in a given year is made good through the Collection Fund Reserve with a corresponding adjustment made to the budgeted income levels in the following financial year.

Collection Fund income, (Council Tax and NNDR), has been volatile in recent years and is likely to continue to be volatile in future years both from the ever-changing NNDR reliefs and from the collectability of the taxes due to the cost-of-living crisis and economic circumstances. The Revenue Reserves Policy actually details an estimated reduction in the level of funding held in the Collection Fund Reserve from £4.5m, as at April 2023, to £3.2m at March 2024 which is deemed to be a more realistic level required when considering the relevant risks of the respective income streams.

There is no direct connection between the reduction of the Collection Fund and the creation of the Earmarked fund to cover the costs of the Schools/Westlands PFI,

Fees and Charges

Q29. Please can you provide the current costs of parking charges for 2023/2024 so that they can be compared with the increased costs for 2024/2025. **(Alan Denby/Councillor Billings)**

The Council's parking charges for 2023/2024 are available on the Council's website;
<https://www.torbay.gov.uk/parking/car-park-charges/>

Q30. The zoo licensing charges are increasing by 300% & 400% can we have some background on the reasons for this? **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

First ever licence Current fee £995 – proposed fee £3000

The current fee does not cover the required activity. There is a lot more preparation in advance of a first ever licence inspection. Costs are based on 6 yearly inspection visits cost plus 2 days prep

Calculation - Actual cost = £3164.47 (based on 6 yearly inspections visit cost below) plus another £1000 (2 days) for prep as first visit = £4164.47 or £3118.47

Stat 6 year inspection - Current fee £400 – proposed £2000

The current fee does not cover the required activity. Ac Current fee £400 – proposed £2000

The current fee does not cover the required activity. Actual cost is £2118.47 – based on 3 yearly inspection visit plus prep. Actual cost is £2118.47 – based on 3 yearly inspections plus prep

Periodic 3 yearly inspections - Current fee £400 – proposed £2000

The current fee does not cover the required activity. Actual cost is £2118.47 – based on 3 yearly inspection visits plus preparation.

Informal Annual Inspection – no increase proposed.

Q31. The Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) licensing costs are going down for new applications and renewals but it is going up for “renewal (enforced)”. Please can the reasons for this be explained. **(Jo Williams/Councillor Tranter)**

The figures quotes in the fees and charges spreadsheet are incorrect and have now been corrected.

Q32. Why is the charge for a Rounders 2 hour session going up by so much? **(Alan Denby/Councillor Jackie Thomas)**

Fees for rounders pitch hire has been increased to bring the fees in line with charges for 2 hour hire of football or rugby pitches excluding changing room/toilet use. This is to ensure the costs associated with reinstatement of damage to grass, mowing and line marking of these pitches is recovered.

Q33. There is a section for chargeable waste at the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC), has the government not scrapped all charges for DIY waste from 31 December 2023 see link below (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charges-for-disposing-of-diy-waste-at-recycling-centres-scrapped>)? Can you explain under what circumstances these charges will be made? **(Alan Denby/Councillor Billings)**

The Government have amended legislation so that a restricted amount of DIY waste can be brought into HWRCs for free. SWISCo introduced this change from the 2nd January 2024. Residents who are undertaking their own small DIY projects, will be able to visit the HWRC with a limited amount which can be disposed of for free. In a single visit no more than 100 litres, which much fit into two 50 litre bags or one bulky item, no larger than 2m x 0.75m x 0.7m can be accepted for free. If more than this limit is brought to the HWRC, the additional DIY waste will be charged for at the current prices. The Government have also stipulated residents can visit a HWRC a maximum of four times in one month with DIY waste. As we have the booking system in place, the limit to four visits is already set and will remain in place. The types of waste that is listed as DIY includes, but is not limited to, plasterboard, concrete, rubble, shower trays, baths and toilets.

Equality Impact Assessment

Q34. Equality Impact Assessment of the draft budget advises that people with the characteristic of gender reassignment may be disproportionately affected by cuts to Adult Social Care and Children's Services and that appropriate care and support will be limited. Please could the detail around this be provided? **(Matthew Fairclough-Kay/Councillor Tranter)**

No cuts are included in the budget for Adults' or Children's Services.

Torbay Council has a duty under the Equality Act to ensure that it considers equality when taking decisions. To help us fulfil this duty, the Council has completed an equality impact

assessment (EIA) on the budget. The EIA considers the potential impacts that the budget setting process may have on those with protected characteristics.

At this stage in the EIA process, it is not possible to be fully sure of the potential impacts. Where impacts have been identified, these are based on assumptions informed by research into community needs. Specifically, regarding gender reassignment, this group was highlighted due to the increased prevalence of mental health and wellbeing needs within this demographic.

As stated in the EIA, services will continue to take a case-by-case approach in their delivery of services to ensure that individuals receive support tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. To ensure that equality is fully considered, individual decisions will be further assessed as proposals develop and go through the decision-making cycle independently where required.

The current draft budget EIA will be reviewed prior to the publication of the final budget papers for full Council. This review will incorporate feedback from the budget consultation to ensure that the EIA remains up to date throughout the budget setting process.

Q35. There was a recent article on the BBC Website see [Torbay Council's assets could go on sale to raise funds - BBC News](#) which refers to one of the ways the Council could raise money is to review out of area investments. Which assets does the Council intend to sell and how will that impact on any loss of income generated by those assets? **(Malcolm Coe/Councillor Tyerman)**

There is no specified requirement within the 2024/25 budget for the Council to sell any of its current asset holdings. However, with the Council's long term borrowing being in excess of £360m, along with an ambitious intention for significant capital investment across Torbay, the Council is required to review its holding of assets prior to entering into any further Public Works Loan Board debt.

Therefore, as stated in the draft budget papers, the Council will review and revise the strategy, and criteria for holding, investing and disposing of high value assets.

Priorities and Resources Question Plan Responses to Questions 1, 2 9 and 10

The Council has a ring-fenced grant from Government to help fund core public health functions. This grant supports the commissioning of public health services that contribute to addressing needs identified in our local population such as reducing and preventing ill health and disability. Most of the factors that affect population health have multiple causes and effective response involves working across Council departments, with partners and with local communities. This is the core function of the public health team. They assess and monitor needs, support partnerships, develop multi-agency strategies and plans, and commission relevant services. The budget for the team in 23/24 is £1.2m which represents 12% of the grant.

Area of focus	Activities	Staff resources	Budgetary allocation
Poverty	Turning the Tide on Poverty/ Cost of Living Crisis response	Lincoln Sargeant, Julia Chisnell, Bruce Bell	None directly other than staff time
Ill health and disability	Stop Smoking provision (incl NRT recharges, GP's and pharmacies)	Bruce Bell, Claire Tatton, Mark Richards, Ian Tyson, Sarah Aston, Natasha Reed,	£348,100 in 23/24
	Alcohol Service		£459,400 in 23/24
	Healthy Behaviours Service (excluding stop smoking)		£244,200 in 23/24
	Sexual and Reproductive Health Service (incl PrEP, prevention and GP and pharmacies)		£1,535,900 in 23/24
	Health protection (disease prevention & response, screening & immunisation, health emergency & pandemic preparedness)	Julia Chisnell, Mandy Guy, Lu Wills	None directly other than staff time
	Partnership working with NHS, VCSE & other sectors to address specific disease and		

Area of focus	Activities	Staff resources	Budgetary allocation
	<p>condition areas (eg CVD, Cancers, ageing and frailty)</p> <p>Link to Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy: <u>Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026 - Torbay Council</u></p>		None directly other than staff time
Adult obesity	<p>Healthy Behaviours Service Torbay on the Move</p> <p>Back to Sport II</p> <p>Community Food Partnership</p>	Bruce Bell, Claire Tatton, Mark Richards, Ian Tyson	<p>£138,000 in 23/24</p> <p>£40,000 (for Sports post in Council)</p> <p>£50,000 (funding only present for 23/24)</p> <p>None directly other than staff time</p>
Suicide prevention and mental wellbeing	<p>Suicide Prevention and self-Harm action plan <u>torbay_suicide_prevention_plan_24_27_final-full.pdf</u></p>	Rachel Bell, Lu Wills, Julia Chisnell	None directly other than staff time