TORBAY COUNCIL

Budget 2025/2026 - Consultation Report

Contents

Executive Summary

The Cabinet published draft proposals for the council's revenue and capital budget for 2025/26 in November 2024. An online survey was created to gather public views. The consultation opened on Wednesday 27 November 2024 and was open until midnight on Sunday 12 January 2025.

There were 146 responses to the consultation survey, all received online. All percentages shown within this report use the number of people that completed the survey as the denominator. All comments within this report are shown as written by the respondent. No written representations were received.

During the course of the consultation, residents and stakeholders were encouraged to take part with posts on our Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Nextdoor pages as well as articles in One Torbay and Staff News.

As part of the consultation the Overview and Scrutiny Board considered the Cabinet's proposals through its Priorities and Resources Review Panel. The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Board are shown in Appendix A to this report.

A summary of responses to the consultation survey (as %) are shown in the table on the next page:

Question	Very much agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Very much disagree	Don't know
To what extent do you agree with us continuing to deliver our joint adult social care transformation programme, to identify savings and efficiencies, focussing on areas such as reablement, learning disability support and extra care provision?	**24.66%**	**33.56%**	16.44%	13.70%	8.22%	3.42%
To what extent do you agree with increasing the homelessness prevention budget by £100,000 to continue to focus on preventing homelessness - reducing the length of stay in temporary accommodation, identifying cost effective temporary accommodation and improving access to permanent homes?	**30.14%**	**36.30%**	8.90%	14.38%	10.27%	0%
To what extent do you agree with the proposals to continue focussing on early help, support and prevention through Family Hubs for children and their families?	**23.97%**	**41.78%**	18.49%	8.90%	5.48%	1.37%
To what extent do you agree with the proposals for us to continue working with children and young people and their parents/carers to promote safe independent travel to school?	**17.12%**	**41.10%**	16.44%	16.44%	7.53%	1.37%
To what extent do you agree with the proposals in relation to providing a further £400,000 towards Operation Brighter Bay and Operation Town Centres?	**30.82%**	**30.82%**	13.70%	14.38%	9.59%	0.68%

To what extent do you agree with our proposals to increase the number of Planning Enforcement Officers through an increase in funding of £100,000?	**17.81%**	**21.92%**	23.29%	25.34%	10.96%	0.68%
To what extent do you agree with our proposals to increase the Council's repairs and maintenance budget by £400,000 to help stabilise the current condition of our assets?	**32.88%**	**38.36%**	14.38%	6.85%	7.53%	0%
To what extent do you agree with our proposals to develop a Financial Sustainability Plan to review how the Council supports, and provides long-term financial sustainability to, the cultural assets of Torre Abbey, Cockington Court and Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust.	**23.29%**	**41.10%**	14.38%	11.64%	8.22%	1.37%
To what extent do you agree with the proposal in relation to the Council's fees and charges?	5.48%	21.23%	23.97%	**28.08%**	**20.55%**	0.68%
To what extent do you agree with the proposals in relation to Council Tax?	6.85%	22.60%	21.92%	**21.92%**	**26.03%**	0.68%

Introduction

The Cabinet published its draft proposals for the Council's revenue and capital budget for 2025/26 in November 2025. An online survey was created to gather the views of the public. Paper surveys were available on request.

The consultation opened on 27 November 2024 and closed at midnight on 12 January 2025.

The audience for this consultation was all those that live or run a business in one of the three towns of Torbay – Torquay, Paignton and Brixham.

The consultation was promoted in several ways. This included:

- Media briefing
- The Council's e-Newsletter One Torbay
- Through staff news updates (as the majority of our employees are also Torbay residents)
- Press release
- Social media
- On the Consultation webpage on the Councils website and on Have Your Say Torbay – the Council's engagement platform

A press release was sent out in November encouraging people to take part. 16 social media posts were scheduled in total. This was across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Nextdoor. Across all the social media channels the posts made 16,029 impressions. There were 126 clicks on the links to view the budget consultation, compared to last year there were 174 link clicks. 32 comments were left on the posts (24 last year), 15 reactions (22 last year) and 21 shares (18 last year).

Four articles were shared through either the One Torbay or Staff News e-Newsletters. In total these articles encouraged 141 subscribers to click on the links to the consultation 168 times. In comparison to the Budget Consultation that took place last year, there were 1,104 unique clicks from the e-newsletter articles.

The total number of responses received was 146, all of these were completed online.

Responses to the Proposals

Adult and Community Services

Joint Adult Social Care Transformation Programme
To what extent do you agree with us continuing to deliver our joint adult social care transformation programme, to identify savings and efficiencies, focussing on areas such as reablement, learning disability support and extra care provision?

	Number	Percentage
Very much agree with this proposal	36	24.66%
Agree with this proposal	49	33.56%
Neither agree nor disagree	24	16.44%
Disagree with this proposal	20	13.70%
Very much disagree with this proposal	12	8.22%
Don't know	5	3.42%

Homelessness prevention

To what extent do you agree with increasing the homelessness prevention budget by £100,000 to continue to focus on preventing homelessness - reducing the length of stay in temporary accommodation, identifying cost effective temporary accommodation and improving access to permanent homes?

	Number	Percentage
Very much agree with this proposal	44	30.14%
Agree with this proposal	53	36.30%
Neither agree nor disagree	13	8.90%
Disagree with this proposal	21	14.38%
Very much disagree with this proposal	15	10.27%
Don't know	0	0.00%

Respondents were asked to provide any comments about the Cabinet's proposals in relation to adult and community services. The themes and comments are summarised below.

Theme	Summary
Too much investment in adult and community services / homelessness (18 comments)	Concerns about the effectiveness of shared adult social care with Torbay and South Devon. Multiple concerns about the adequacy of services and the effectiveness/impact of additional funding. Calls for costing and feasibility checks. Suggestions that the money could be better spent elsewhere. Insufficient information on how success will be measured in Adult & Community Services. Some view the funding as a bottomless pit that won't solve the issues.
Support for proposed budget/homelessness support (11 comments)	Some comments support focusing on savings and efficiencies in adult services but emphasize balancing this with broader community needs. Multiple comments urge more support to prevent homelessness. Many comments highlight the need to increase the homelessness budget.
Encourage work and reduce social support (4 comments)	Calls for encouraging people to return to work and reduce reliance on social support. Need to encourage those able to work to find employment
High Council Tax burden (4 comments)	Concerns about the high council tax burden and yearly rises, especially for pensioners. Calls for more efficiency savings to avoid increasing council tax.

Family Hubs

To what extent do you agree with the proposals to continue focussing on early help, support and prevention through Family Hubs for children and their families?

	Number	Percentage
Very much agree with this proposal	35	23.97%
Agree with this proposal	61	41.78%
Neither agree nor disagree	27	18.49%
Disagree with this proposal	13	8.90%
Very much disagree with this proposal	8	5.48%
Don't know	2	1.37%

Independent travel to school

To what extent do you agree with the proposals for us to continue working with children and young people and their parents/carers to promote safe independent travel to school?

	Number	Percentage
Very much agree with this proposal	25	17.12%
Agree with this proposal	60	41.10%
Neither agree nor disagree	24	16.44%
Disagree with this proposal	24	16.44%
Very much disagree with this proposal	11	7.53%
Don't know	2	1.37%

Respondents were asked to provide any comments about the Cabinet's proposals in relation to children's services. The themes and comments are summarised below.

Theme	Summary
Should focus on parental responsibility (18 comments)	A significant number of comments emphasize that parents should take responsibility for their children's safety, feeding, and transportation to school.
Against proposals (16 comments)	Concerns about the budget for travel from home to school, with some advocating for maintaining or increasing it, while others suggest it is a waste of money. Some comments call for clear outcomes or goals for the proposed spending. There is a call for more mental health support and better integration of services into schools.

	Suggestions for investing in infrastructure improvements to ensure safe travel for children.
Criticism of council spending (7 comments)	Comments criticize the high salaries of senior managers and the perceived waste of money in current arrangements. Some comments express general dissatisfaction with the council's handling of children's services and the perceived lack of improvement.
Support for proposals (6 comments)	Many support the proposals for Children's Services, especially the focus on early help and prevention through Family Hubs. However, there is a call for more funding for at-risk children and infrastructure improvements for safe travel to school.

Place-based services

Operation Brighter Bay and Operation Town Centres

To what extent do you agree with the proposals in relation to providing a further £400,000 towards Operation Brighter Bay and Operation Town Centres?

	Number	Percentage
Very much agree with this proposal	45	30.82%
Agree with this proposal	45	30.82%
Neither agree nor disagree	20	13.70%
Disagree with this proposal	21	14.38%
Very much disagree with this proposal	14	9.59%
Don't know	1	0.68%

Planning Enforcement Officers

To what extent do you agree with our proposals to increase the number of Planning Enforcement Officers through an increase in funding of £100,000?

	Number	Percentage
Very much agree with this proposal	26	17.81%
Agree with this proposal	32	21.92%
Neither agree nor disagree	34	23.29%
Disagree with this proposal	37	25.34%
Very much disagree with this proposal	16	10.96%
Don't know	1	0.68%

Repairs and maintenance

To what extent do you agree with our proposals to increase the council's repairs and maintenance budget by £400,000 to help stabilise the current condition of our assets?

	Number	Percentage
Very much agree with this proposal	48	32.88%
Agree with this proposal	56	38.36%
Neither agree nor disagree	21	14.38%
Disagree with this proposal	10	6.85%
Very much disagree with this proposal	11	7.53%
Don't know	0	0.00%

Support and long-term financial sustainability for cultural assets

To what extent do you agree with our proposals to develop a Financial Sustainability Plan to review how the council supports, and provides long-term financial sustainability to, the cultural assets of Torre Abbey, Cockington Court and Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust?

	Number	Percentage
Very much agree with this proposal	34	23.29%
Agree with this proposal	60	41.10%
Neither agree nor disagree	21	14.38%
Disagree with this proposal	17	11.64%
Very much disagree with this proposal	12	8.22%
Don't know	2	1.37%

Respondents were asked to provide any comments about the Cabinet's proposals in relation to place-based services. The themes and comments are summarised below.

Theme	Summary
Against place-based investment (11 comments)	Emphasis on the need for basic services like road and pavement cleaning, and addressing issues with leaves and debris. Calls for more efficient use of council funds, competitive tendering, and better value for money.
Support for place-based investment (10 comments)	Many comments support initiatives like Operation Brighter Bay and Operation Town Centres, emphasizing the need for clean, safe, and appealing public spaces.
Cultural assets (8 comments)	Mixed opinions on funding cultural assets; some see them as financial burdens while

	others believe they are essential for tourism. Comments stress the importance of preserving Victorian properties and promoting Torquay as a heritage destination.
Road infrastructure (7 comments)	Several comments highlight the need for better road maintenance, including addressing potholes and worn road markings.

Fees and charges

To what extent do you agree with the proposal in relation to the council's fees and charges?

	Number	Percentage
Very much agree with this proposal	8	5.48%
Agree with this proposal	31	21.23%
Neither agree nor disagree	35	23.97%
Disagree with this proposal	41	28.08%
Very much disagree with this proposal	30	20.55%
Don't know	1	0.68%

Respondents were asked to provide any comments about the Cabinet's proposals in relation to fees and charges. The themes and comments are summarised below.

Theme	Summary
Against fee increases or concern (22 comments)	Many comments express concerns about the increase in fees and charges, emphasizing the need for these increases to be reasonable and not disproportionately affect those on lower incomes. Several comments suggest that sports fees should remain the same to encourage community health and participation. Comments suggest improving tourism to help the local economy and keeping fees reasonable to avoid deterring tourists.
Criticism of council spending and efficiency (8 comments)	Numerous comments criticize the council's spending, suggesting that there is wastefulness and that savings could be made by increasing efficiency. Several comments call for greater transparency and accountability in how the council spends its budget, with specific examples of perceived wasteful spending.
Support for fee increases (7 comments)	A few comments indicate support for higher charges if they lead to improved services.

Burden of council tax on residents (7 comments)	Many comments highlight the burden of council tax on residents, especially pensioners and those on fixed incomes, and suggest that any increases should be in line with annual pay rises.
Parking issues (free parking, high charges) (6 comments)	There are multiple comments about parking, including suggestions for free parking in certain areas and times, and complaints about high parking charges.

Council Tax

To what extent do you agree with the proposals in relation to Council Tax?

	Number	Percentage
Very much agree with this proposal	10	6.85%
Agree with this proposal	33	22.60%
Neither agree nor disagree	32	21.92%
Disagree with this proposal	32	21.92%
Very much disagree with this proposal	38	26.03%
Don’t know	1	0.68%

Respondents were asked to provide any comments about the Cabinet’s proposals in relation to Council Tax. The themes and comments are summarised below.

Theme	Summary
Concerns about Council Tax increases (33 comments)	Many comments express concerns about the increase in Council Tax, emphasizing the need for these increases to be reasonable and not disproportionately affect those on lower incomes. Several comments suggest that residents do not feel they are getting good value for the Council Tax they pay. Some comments suggest that extra funding should come from central government rather than increasing local taxes.
Criticism of council spending and efficiency (10 comments)	Numerous comments criticize the council's spending, suggesting that there is wastefulness and that savings could be made by increasing efficiency.
Support for higher charges if services improve (9 comments)	A few comments indicate support for higher charges if they lead to improved services.

Burden on residents (8 comments)	Many comments highlight the burden of Council Tax on residents, especially pensioners and those on fixed incomes.

Revenue and Capital Budget 2025/2026 – Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Report to Cabinet to be considered as part of the budget consultation

Background

1. The Cabinet's Draft Revenue and Capital Budget proposals for 2025/2026 were published on 26 November 2024 and available on the Council's website at Budget for 2025/2026. The Panel considered the following documents as part of the consultation process:

    - Revenue Report:
        - Budget Overview;
        - Chief Finance Officer Statement;
        - Fees and Charges;
        - Reserves Statement
        - Financial Sustainability Plans Summary;
    - Capital Report:
        - Capital Strategy;
        - Treasury Management Strategy;
        - Grant Funding Pending Business Case;
        - Updated Capital Investment Plan;
    - Safer Communities Annual Review Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence and Drugs and Alcohol Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board;
    - Multiple Complex Needs Alliance Review Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board; and
    - Key Lines of Enquiry/Questions and Answers

2. The background papers to the Review can be found at:

    Agenda for Priorities and Resources Review Panel 2025/26 on Tuesday, 10 December 2024, 5.30 pm

3. The Priorities and Resources Review Panel 2025/26 was established to scrutinise the proposals and to make comments, observations and recommendations as necessary to the Cabinet's Revenue and Capital Budget proposals for 2025/26. The Review Panel comprised of the Councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Board, as they had developed a strategic and overall knowledge of the Council's revenue and capital budgets through quarterly monitoring meetings held throughout the year, namely, Councillors Cowell, Douglas-Dunbar, Fellows, Foster, Johns, Law, Long, Spacagna and Tolchard plus Councillor Bryant (Chaired by Councillor Spacagna).

4. The Review Panel met in public on 10 December 2024 and heard evidence from the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Members as well the Chief Executive and Directors. They met on 16 December 2024 in private to agree the key findings and recommendations to the Cabinet. heard.

Key Findings

5. The Panel considered the proposals for investment in services, efficiencies and income generation for 2025/2026 and the Capital Budget and the findings from their meetings are set out in this report. The report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board 8

January 2025 and approved unanimously and will now be submitted to the Cabinet as part of the consultation process.

Revenue Budget

6. Budget Overview

6.1 The Panel reviewed all of the Consultation documents for the proposed Revenue and Capital Budget 2025/26. Unlike other Councils who continue to report financial difficulties and the need to reduce services, Torbay Council is in a secure financial position through careful financial management and investment. It was acknowledged that there were no significant changes to services proposed within the draft Budget with a continuation of the Financial Sustainability Plans introduced in 2024/25 to help to ensure that high-cost budget items remain on track, with innovative solutions expanded and delivered to provide the best outcomes within the financial envelope the Council works with. Members noted that the Local Government Finance Settlement figure had not yet been confirmed by Government and that the proposed budget had been prepared during a period of uncertainty. It was anticipated that the Government would confirm the Settlement figure the week commencing 16 December 2024, but in previous years it had been as late as Christmas Eve. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Finance indicated that it was expected that the final Settlement would cover the £400,000 shortfall in the consultation documents as well as allowing for some additional investment. Once received the Chief Finance Officer would provide a written statement to all Councillors setting out the final implications of the funding. This would then be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board alongside this draft Report on 8 January 2025, where they would be able to make amendments to this Report as required.

6.2 The proposals within the current budget consultation papers included investing:

- £200,000 in Operation Brighter Bay;
- £200,000 in Operation Town Centres;
- £1.7m (funded through the Adult Social Care Precept) increase in contract fee for Adult Social Care;
- £1.1m to meet service demand and inflationary increases to pay and provider costs for Children's Services;
- £150,000 to meet the pressures of temporary accommodation and preventing homelessness;
- £100,000 in Legal Service Budget;
- £100,000 to recruit additional Planning Enforcement Officers;
- £400,000 for repairs and maintenance;
- £110,000 for inflationary pressures in Insurance and IT Licences;
- £375,000 for inflationary increase to SWISCo contract; and
- £200,000 to reflect the cost of implementing the National Living Wage.

6.3 The proposals would set a Council Tax rate of 2.75% plus the 2% precept for adult social care. With each 1% of Council tax estimated to generate £840,000 of additional income to deliver services.

6.4 From April 2025, the Council would be increasing the amount of Council Tax payable on second homes to 100%. This increase, along with the review of Single Persons Discount and the changes to the Working Age Council Tax Reduction, has been estimated to increase the base budget by £2.596m for 2025/26.

7. Key Lines of Enquiry

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

Members noted that the Council had analysed the risks regarding time limited grant funding utilised in 2024/25. In the event of such Council administered grant funding not continuing beyond 31 March 2025, continuity of service would be reviewed and, where possible, maintained through budget allocation or the drawdown of reserves.

Members further questioned whether the services would be kept at the same level if additional grant funding was not received from the Government and were advised that it would be the intention for the service output to remain the same so residents did not receive a less beneficial service.

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

Members were advised that the Community Ward Funds of £2,000 per Councillor was in the base budget and would continue. The Cabinet would consider if there could be an increase in each Ward allocation upon receipt of the final settlement as this was one of their ambitions.

Members questioned whether unspent monies within the Ward Funds would continue to be rolled over into the next financial year. Members were advised that unspent monies would continue to be rolled over, however, there was an expectation that the annual monies would not be rolled over continually until the end of 4-year period. Members raised concern over the continued difficulties that had been experienced with spending Ward Funds on areas such as play parks and gardens due to other processes e.g. Play Park Review. It was agreed that specific cases would be taken up by the Chief Executive to see if schemes could be progressed.

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

Members noted that the draft Fees and Charges document, in some places, detailed 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 charged significantly less than others. However, these are officer calculations which should not have been published in the draft fees and charges document. The Cabinet confirmed that the sports related fees for 2025/26 would increase by an average of 3.5%.

Members were concerned that the initial proposed increase had been included within Consultation documents as this had caused some concern to both Members and external organisations but were satisfied that they would be 3.5% in line with other increases. Members questioned the need for cost recovery within sports facilities which did not align with the importance of physical activity to residents for health, mental health, ensuring children keep active and reduce anti-social behaviour. It was highlighted that local Councils had always subsidised sports facilities due to this. Members were advised that the initial proposed increase had been calculated by Officers however it was not the Cabinet's intension for this to be included in the fees and charges. They needed to see what the cost recovery would look like in terms of pounds to understand how much it was being subsidised by. Members requested a written response on the figures that Officers used to arrive at 15%.

7.4 Some Councils have used the additional funding received from Council Tax for empty homes and second homes to fund affordable housing, how much money was raised through this in Torbay and what consideration has the Cabinet given to using this income in the same way for Torbay?

Members were advised that introduction of charging a 100% premium on second homes would commence from 1 April 2025. It was difficult to ascertain the exact amount of additional income this would generate for the Council as, some homeowners could either sell, or re-purpose their properties to avoid the additional tax implication. Based on a mid-level scenario, it had been estimated that an additional £1.4m could be generated. This had been factored into the Council's current 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 had 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, the Cabinet would consider whether there was 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 the Housing Delivery Plan.

Members were concerned that that Torbay Council had chosen not to allocate the additional income, as other Local Authorities had, to help provide affordable housing and questioned whether there would be a further opportunity for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to receive feedback on this issue once the final settlement figure was received.

Members were advised that all Members would receive a briefing, once the final settlement figure was known and if this figure had helped to close the budget gap of £400k and provide any additional surplus funding.

7.5 The report proposed 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%?

Members noted that the Council would generate an extra circa £219k if the Council Tax increase was to be set at the maximum limit to the cap set by Government.

Members raised concern regarding the future base budget if the Council Tax increase was to continue to be set at the lower rate with the full rate costing Bands A to C approximately 7p a week or 17p a week for a higher band. This could result in a cumulative loss of £1m less in the base budget after four years which could have been allocated to improve public services for residents.

7.6 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?

Members were referred to the December 2024 Reserves Statement, the Council aims to set a General Reserve at £7.6m at 31 March 2025 of 5% of the 2025/26 net revenue budget. In addition to this, the Council would aim to retain a Comprehensive Spending Reserve at £3.2m which would continue to be utilised for 'invest to save' initiatives.

Capital Budget

8 Key Lines of Enquiry

8.1 What was the governance around additional Government Grants for highways?

Members were informed that 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 was 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.

Members questioned how the allocated funding for Highways was being used to rectify the backlog of highways repairs and maintenance and if the £250,000 that was rolled over from 2023/2024 to 2024/2025 had been spent. Members were informed that Officers had previously advised the Cabinet that £68m would be required to rectify the backlog to bring the roads in Torbay to a good standard but this was reliant on Government funding. Any highways funding that was not spent in year would be rolled over and a written response would be provided on the current highways spend for 2024/2025.

Members highlighted that it was not just about the budget it was about the capacity of the Highways Team and Parking Team to implement Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ) and 20 mph zones. The Parking Team were involved in the CPZs and there had been delays due to sudden staffing shortages. The same people in the Highways Team deal with both issues. Members requested a written response on the levels of staff for Highways compared to the last three years.

Members raised concern that sport in Torbay was underinvested, and that budget should be allocated to sport in the Revenue base budget rather than being dependent on funding. Sport in Torbay was not only about infrastructure, it was of benefit to individuals as well for example this year, Abigail Martin who lives in Torbay took part in the Olympics 2024 with support from sport funding. Members highlighted the loss of the free skatepark in Paignton and questioned if there was funding included within the budget for a feasibility of a replacement facility. In response Members were informed that a community group had come together and were looking at various options to bring forward an additional skatepark. Members requested that sport be given a higher priority on the wish list, especially free sports facilities for use by the whole of the community, if there is additional funding in the final Settlement.

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

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

There were two added complications to be aware of:

1) the grant conditions were currently unknown; and

2) how does devolution play into this and who are the decision makers in regard to the Local Transport Authority work.

Torbay Council have financially subsidised 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, demonstrating investment in newer more accessible vehicles.

Officers 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.

Members raised concerns regarding engagement that had happened with all Torbay Council Ward Councillors and the general public in the areas that are underserviced by local buses and wanted to understand what opportunities the funding presented. Members were advised that engagement would be held with the community either via the Community Partnerships or with Ward Councillors the Group Leaders being given the opportunity to comment before any decisions were made, however the Council would have to wait until the full grant conditions were known before any processes could begin.

8.3 What is the current situation regarding Edginswell Railway Station?

Members noted that 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.

Members questioned what actions the Cabinet had taken to lobby the Government and were advised that meetings were held prior to the General Election with Ministers. It was made clear that there was a funding gap of £7m that Torbay Council would be required to fund. The local MP for Torbay had agreed to continue to lobby the Government but until the funding gap was found, the scheme cannot progress further. Recent meetings with Ministers had confirmed that additional funding was not available at this time, but efforts would be continued to be made to push forward the scheme and seek the additional funding.

8.4 £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?

Members noted that 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 and access external funding. However, the Cabinet would re-consider whether further funding could be allocated into sport upon receipt of the final settlement figure during December 2024.

8.5 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?

Members noted that SWISCo on behalf of Torbay Council were currently collating the feedback that was provided by Children's Services consultation and engagement with play users over the summer months 2024 and were 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 area basis and a report will come through to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in the last quarter of 2024/2025. Such detail was not known in time for the 2025/26 budget proposals.

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

The Panel raised concerns regarding the number of play parks in Torbay with broken equipment and that some Members were using their Community Ward Funds to carry out repairs and purchase replacement equipment, as well as the implications arising from the delay of the Review of Play Parks Report.

It was noted that there were 72 playparks in Torbay and the allocated annual budget for parks was £67,000. Through this budget, only a limited amount of reactive and preventative repairs and maintenance could be carried out and Members highlighted the poor condition of some of the equipment with damaged equipment being removed without being replaced. It was suggested that a reserve should be created for Play Parks but the amount of such a reserve would not be known until the Review had been concluded. Once the Play Park Review had been completed, a more stable funding package could be identified based on need and priority. Members were requested to refer issues with specific play parks to the Cabinet Member for Pride in Place, Transport and Parking who agreed to look at them outside the review of the budget.

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

Members were informed that Homes England currently have 17 funds and this was expected to be reduced 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 have 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.

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

Members highlighted the need to build on brownfield sites and the additional costs associated with affordable housing and the requirement for additional Government Funding or Council Reserves to help realise this.

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

Members were advised that 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 was managed by the Councils asset team and was ring-fenced at £76k per year.

There was 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.

Members questioned what action was being taken against anti-social behaviour issues within multi-storey car parks to enable residents to feel confident when parking; when was the lining issues in car parks going to be resolved so as to better mark out parking spaces; what capital investment was being planned for investment in car parks and where would this be allocated from; how were areas prioritised for the refreshment of white lines and could residential areas be given priority as well as front facing areas; and how much does the consultation process for Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) cost.

Members were advised that SWISCo have the responsibility for multi-story car parks cleaning and further funds had been allocated to increase the cleaning, new lighting had been introduced into some of the public car parks and CCTV had been introduced at the Terrace car park.

Members noted that a number of car parks were included within the Council's planned Regeneration Projects and whilst the Council was aware there are car parks such as Union Square and Victoria Square Car Parks that require maintenance, as these car parks were planned to be demolished as part of the redevelopment, it would not be in the best interests of the Council and the residents of Torbay to spend money on carrying out maintenance on these car parks.

With regards to the white lining, Members noted that external Line Painting was contracted for the larger routes as this was cost effective and SWISCo now have an in-house Line Painting Team with a new truck to carry out the work required to refresh the white lines on the roads within Torbay and this had been enabled through Brighter Bay funding. The Team was currently working on marking lines for road safety measures as instructed by the Head of Highways. The lining refreshment of all car parks would be reviewed in 2026, however when the Team are working in an area that includes car parks that required lining refreshment, this work was carried out at the same time resulting in some car parks receiving attention sooner than others. The aspiration is that by the end of 2024, the Team would have completed most of the highway markings within Torbay that are safety critical, including a lot of the residential areas, then they can move onto other priority areas in 2025.

Members noted that Traffic Regulation Orders were a long process as they required two sets of consultation to take place to allow for the public highway to be altered. The cost to implement a TRO was on average £20k however there were some areas which were more complicated which would incur a higher charge e.g. outside a school.

9. Conclusion and Update from Overview and Scrutiny Board 8 January 2025

9.1 The Panel reflected and debated the information provided to them, both verbal and written, following which recommendations were formed (as set out below). Members welcomed that due to prudent management of the Revenue Budget over the past few years, there were no specific cuts to services identified within the proposals with focus being given to the high-spend areas via the Financial Sustainability Plans. Overall Members supported the Revenue and Capital Budget 2025/2026 consultation with the awareness that the Local Government Finance Settlement figure had not yet been received and that further information would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 8 January 2025, when they considered their draft report.

9.2 Members were mindful of the uncertainty in respect of funding for services such as Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, Drug and Alcohol and Holiday Activities and Food Programme but this was alleviated by the assurance of the Cabinet that users would not see a reduction in those services and that Reserves would be used if necessary.

9.3 Members felt that more priority should be given within the budget to sport, play parks and affordable housing and that additional funding should be allocated to these areas should the Settlement be more favourable as well as consideration to increasing the amount allocated to the Community Ward Funds.

9.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Board received an update on the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025/2026 as set out in Appendix 1 to this Report. It was noted that the amount of compensation towards the increased National Insurance contributions was not known but was expected to be significantly lower than the actual costs, this would need to be addressed by the Cabinet when they set their final budget proposals. Overall, it was anticipated that there was an additional £5.760m funding for the Base Revenue Budget and an additional £4.012m one off funding. The concerns raised above in respect of Domestic Abuse were now funded plus an additional £100k. The Board welcomed the additional funding announced by the Government but was concerned in respect of the uncertainty around the National Insurance liability.

9.5 The Panel formed the following recommendations to the Cabinet which were approved (with the addition of recommendation 4) by the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 8 January 2025. On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried unanimously.

10. Recommendations

10.1 That the Cabinet be recommended:

1. that £75,000 Revenue funding be included in the base budget to support sport in 2025/26 and future years;
2. that a Reserve of £500,000 be created for play parks;
3. that an affordable housing reserve be created using the second homes additional Council Tax funding to help close the gap on affordable housing schemes; and
4. that a reserve be created for Children's Services to respond to any market pressures arising from National Insurance rate increases.

Additional Base Revenue Resources

Area	Increase / (Decrease) £000	Comments
Council Tax Base (Council calculation)	1,010	Actual base figures asat 30 November 2024
Additional Social Care Grant	3,430	50/50 split between Adults and Children
Children Social Care Prevention grant	605	Assumption is that this will be base revenue funding
Business Rates/Revenue Support Grant/Services Grant	(210)	Net reduction in assumptions
New Homes Bonus	(225)	Net reduction in assumptions
Extended Producer Responsibility (50%)	1,150	New legislation from 2025. Some funding will be baselined
Net Additional ongoing Resources	**5,760**	

Additional 'One-Off' Resources

Area	Resources Increase £000	Comments
Extended Producer Responsibility (50%)	1,150	New legislation from 2025. Some funding anticipated to be time limited
Additional Homelessness / Rough Sleeping Grant	427	Increase from £1m funding allocated in 2024/25
Domestic Abuse safe accommodation grant	100	Assumption that this will be time limited revenue funding
Recovery Grant	2,085	Formula funding targeted to areas of deprivation. Assuming oneoff.
Business Rates levy– allocation from surplus	250	National allocation announced in December '24. Amount tbc
Additional time limited new funding	**4,012**	

Appendix B: Consultation questionnaire respondent profile

Which town do you live in? Select only one

Option	Total	Percentage
Torquay	77	54.23%
Paignton	46	32.39%
Brixham	15	10.56%
Responding as a business	4	2.82%

Which of the following age groups applies to you? Tick one only

Option	Total	Percentage
0-15	0	0.00%
16-24	1	0.68%
25-34	6	4.11%
35-44	10	6.85%
45-54	24	16.44%
55-64	43	29.45%
65-74	47	32.19%
75+	15	10.27%

What is your gender? Select only one

Option	Total	Percentage
Male	75	51.37%
Female	61	41.78%
Prefer not to say	10	6.85%

Which of the following best describes your ethnic background? Tick one only

Option	Total	Percentage
White	137	97.16%
Mixed ethnicity	3	2.13%
Asian or Asian British	0	0.00%
Black or Black British	1	0.71%
Chinese	0	0.00%

Employment Status – Select only one

Option	Total	Percentage
Working full-time in Torbay	23	16.20%
Working full-time elsewhere in Devon	13	9.15%
Working part-time in Torbay	17	11.97%
Working part-time elsewhere in Devon	0	0.00%
Self-employed – full, or part-time	17	11.97%
Student	1	0.70%
Looking after Family/Home	0	0.00%
Temporary Sick	1	0.70%
Long-Term Sick	3	2.11%
Retired	66	46.48%
Unemployed	1	0.70%

Do you consider yourself to be disabled in any way? Tick one only

Option	Total	Percentage
Yes	28	19.18%
No	118	80.82%

If you answered "Yes", please tell us how it affects you. Tick as many as apply

Option	Total	Percentage
It affects my mobility	18	85.71%
It affects my vision	2	9.52%
It affects my hearing	1	4.76%